

**Englishness, Patriotism and the British Left
1881-1924**

by

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Abstract

Historians have shown how, in the last third of the nineteenth century, the language of patriotism and national identity was appropriated by the political right. It has been all too easily assumed that after this they held a monopoly on such language. However, the British left did not give up ideas about patriotism and the nature of Englishness after the revival of socialism in the 1880s. Socialism was rather presented as the restoration of an English past lost to industrial capitalism. They therefore argued for a return to 'Merrie England'. Socialists frequently used radical patriotic vocabulary as a tool in their struggles for social transformation, particularly in defence of what they saw as traditional English liberties. But some socialists also used ideas of Englishness to legitimate their own form of socialism and to repudiate other forms, such as anarchism, syndicalism and Marxism, as 'foreign'. Central to this was a belief that Parliament stood at the centre of the national history. This Whiggish parliamentary view of history was essentially English, yet many who held it were Scottish, Welsh and Irish, and they played a full role in creating a 'British Socialism'.

The First World War dealt a severe blow to radical patriotism. Pro-war sections of the labour movement were brought into the state, and this reinforced their belief in parliamentarism and a consensual patriotism. The anti-war left continued to use radical patriotic language in the early years of the war, for example against the 'foreign yoke' of conscription, but the war degraded patriotism generally and the Russian Revolution gave internationalism a new focus. It also threatened the concept of British Socialism, and the post-war years saw a bitter debate over forms of socialism, when it was argued that Bolshevism was not suited to 'British conditions'. Moderate Labour, convinced that office could only be achieved on terms set by the British Constitution, sought to prove their fitness to govern. This meant concentration on traditional patriotism and the national interest, rather than conceptions of oppositional Englishness. The left of the labour movement now looked to soviet Russia rather than the English past as a model for the future socialist society. Hence the hold of radical patriotism on the British left was broken, but that of patriotism was not. It would take another world war to re-unite the two.

Contents

Abstract	2
Acknowledgements	5
Abbreviations	6
Introduction	7
Chapter 1 Patriotism and Politics before 1881	17
Patriotism and the French Wars	17
Chartism and English Rights	21
After Chartistm	24
Chapter 2 Socialism and Oppositional Englishness 1881-1906	28
Merrie England in the Past	34
Merrie England in the Future	39
Summary	44
Chapter 3 Constructing English Socialism 1881-1906	47
The Fabian Society and the Normal Course of English Life	50
The <i>Clarion</i> and the Walsall Anarchists	52
The ILP and 'British Socialism'	53
Britain for the British or the World for the Workers?	62
The Left and Immigration	66
Summary	70
Chapter 4 The Left, England and an Imperial War	71
Blatchford and England	72
Fabianism and the Empire	74
'Patriotic' Opposition to the War	77
Marxists and Patriotism	85
Summary	90
Chapter 5 The Labour Party and Parliament 1906-1914	92
Labour in the House of Commons	96
Those Without Respect: Critics of the Parliamentary Labour Party	103
Let Us Reform the Labour Party	104
The Industrial Unrest and Syndicalism	108
The Battle of the Ballot	114
More Oppositional Englishness	118
Summary	122

Chapter 6 Socialists and the German Menace in Edwardian England	124
Socialists and National Defence	125
Socialists and Patriotism in Edwardian England	131
The German Menace	133
The Anti-Militarists	138
Summary	143
 Chapter 7 The Left, Patriotism and the First World War 1914-1917	 145
July and August 1914	145
The Pro-War Left	149
The Anti-War Left	153
The Left and Individual Liberty	166
Summary	172
 Chapter 8 The Fight for British Socialism 1917-1921	 173
The Turning of the Tide?	174
'Now for the Enemy at Home'	180
Industrial Unrest and Direct Action	183
British Socialism and Bolshevism	190
Opposition to Intervention in Russia	197
Summary	204
 Chapter 9 Labour and the Nation 1917-1924	 206
Building a National Party	206
Labour and the Children of Moscow	216
Sidney Webb and British Socialism	218
Socialism of the Privy Council	220
The English Game - Labour after the 1923 General Election	230
 Epilogue and Conclusion	 237
 Bibliography	 245

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Abbreviations

ASE	Amalgamated Society of Engineers
BSP	British Socialist Party
BWL	British Workers' League
CPGB	Communist Party of Great Britain
ILP	Independent Labour Party
ISB	International Socialist Bureau
LRC	Labour Representation Committee
NAC	National Administrative Council (ILP)
NCF	No Conscription Fellowship
NUR	National Union of Railwaymen
PLP	Parliamentary Labour Party
SDF/SDP	Social Democratic Federation/Social Democratic Party
SLP	Socialist Labour Party
SNDC	Socialist National Defence Committee
TUC PC	Trades Union Congress Parliamentary Committee
UDC	Union of Democratic Control
WEWNC	War Emergency Workers' National Committee

NOTES ON THE TEXT

Unless otherwise stated, the place of publication for all published material is London.

Where Labour movement is in upper-case it refers to the Labour Party, its affiliated trade unions and socialist societies. Where it is in lower-case, labour movement, it refers to all of these but also to non-affiliated groups.

Introduction

'I am a Socialist *but* I love my country.'¹ So wrote Alfred Johnson to the editor of the Clarion in the early weeks of the Boer War. He had expressed concisely the defensiveness of socialists when discussing affection for 'their' country. This defensiveness has rarely been overcome since the last third of the nineteenth century. It has informed most discussions by the left whether discussing contemporary patriotism or patriotism in the past. It has led to a vague belief that patriotism and socialism have coincided only in individuals, or accidentally due to events outside the control of socialists. Hence when patriotism and socialism are mentioned in the same breath, one thinks of H.M. Hyndman, Robert Blatchford, J.B. Priestley, and above all, George Orwell. Alternatively, as with the British Labour and socialist support for the First World War, it is seen as something of a surprise, a break with the past. It is, perhaps, this defensiveness that has made the analysis of patriotism largely the work of left-wing commentators.² The most obvious recent example was the History Workshop conference on patriotism in the wake of the Falklands War. As Raphael Samuel wrote in the preface to the collection of essays that resulted, 'it seemed that the country had gone mad', and hence the conference's aim was 'deconstructive, to bring patriotism within the province of rational explanation and historical enquiry'.³ Some involved in this left-wing re-think on patriotism have brought more than historical interest to their subject. They have used their conclusions to make a plea for the left to re-embrace patriotism or to reject it once and for all. An early post-war example of a plea for patriotism on the left is A.J.P. Taylor's The Trouble Makers. He decided that 'the Dissenters have been deeply English in blood and temperament.... Paine, Cobbett, Bright, Hobson, Trevelyan - what names could be more redolent of our English past?'⁴ It can be no coincidence that the year after writing that he undertook 'the worthiest activity [he] ever undertook: the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, CND'.⁵ A more recent example is John Schwarzmantel's Socialism and the Idea of the Nation. 'Socialists', he decides, 'need to develop and sustain a concept of the nation, if not exactly a

1 Clarion, 18 Nov 1899. Emphasis added.

2 Miles Taylor, 'Patriotism, History and the Left in Twentieth Century Britain,' Historical Journal, vol. 33, no. 4, 1990, pp.971-987.

3 Raphael Samuel (ed.), Patriotism The Making and Unmaking of the British National Identity Volume I: History and Politics, Routledge, 1989, p.x.

4 A.J.P. Taylor, The Trouble Makers: Dissent Over Foreign Policy 1792-1939, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1985, first published 1957, p.14.

5 A.J.P. Taylor, A Personal History, Hamish Hamilton, 1983, p.225.

form of nationalism, and the idea of the nation need not and should not be the preserve of the Right, as indeed often seems to be the case.⁶ Anthony Barnett provides an example of the rejection of patriotism. Instead, he argues, the left would be better served were it to 'insist upon the plurality of national allegiances ... the diversity of regional differences; the plurality of racial and migrant strains; the importance of gender loyalties; the complexity of religious affiliations; and the conflicting allegiances of class'.⁷ Both views share the idea that the left has at some point given up patriotism. In most instances this is not the case. It is rather that it is only individuals or small groups on the left in Britain who have rejected patriotism altogether. For all the defensiveness, the majority of the British left has been patriotic, not only when events such as wars have overtaken them, but most of the time. The degrees of patriotism and the weight given to patriotism and socialism across the left have differed. It is those whose patriotism has outweighed their socialism most often who are usually the subject of interest. This thesis, while looking at these patriot-socialists, also examines those socialists whose patriotism remained more submerged.

Patriotism cannot be separated from the question of national identity, for even taking its most basic definition, 'love of country', the object must be defined in order to be loved. The nation must be 'imagined' in some form to be worthy of affection.⁸ Hence if most of the British left has expressed a form of patriotism it follows that they have also indulged in interpretations or imaginings of what forms the British nation and the character of its people. To use a phrase of Anthony D. Smith's, 'nationalism-in-general is merely a lazy historian's escape from the arduous task of explaining the influence of this or that particular nationalist idea in its highly specific context.'⁹ This thesis aims to examine ideas of patriotism and Englishness in the historical context of the years that are generally accepted as comprising 'Labour's turning point', and its formative years.¹⁰ That is the period from the publication of H.M. Hyndman's England for All in 1881, which claimed socialism as an Anglo-Saxon mission, to the taking of office by the first Labour government in 1924, committed to governing in the national interest. Discussions of patriotism and Englishness have played a greater part in the shaping of the British left than has previously been thought.

6 John Schwarzmantel, Socialism and the Idea of the Nation, Harvester Wheatsheaf, Hemel Hempstead, 1991, p.1.

7 Anthony Barnett, 'After Nationalism,' in Samuel (ed.), Patriotism I, p.149.

8 Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities, Verso, 1983.

9 Anthony D. Smith, National Identity, Penguin, 1991, p.79.

10 E.J. Hobsbawm (ed.), Labour's Turning Point 1880-1900, second edition, Harvester, Brighton, 1974.

At this point it is necessary to define the parameters of the subject and the terms used in its discussion. The British left is taken to mean those who sought through socialist and independent labour politics the political transformation of the British Isles as a whole.¹¹ This excludes Scottish, Irish and Welsh socialists who aimed at change, in the first instance, only within the borders of their own respective nations, even when this was combined with an internationalism that saw such change as part of a greater world change. Those such as James Connolly, and John Maclean, after he refused to join the Communist Party of Great Britain, are therefore excluded.¹² But included are Scottish, Irish and Welsh figures who wanted change in an all-British context. Ramsay MacDonald, Keir Hardie, Bernard Shaw and J.H. Thomas are therefore included. Largely for this reason, the term 'Englishness' has been maintained in the title, rather than the clumsier 'Britishness'. By consent, Scottish, Welsh and Irish socialists in the British labour movement accepted ideas about a single national political character which drew largely on an interpretation of British history dominated by events in England, such as Magna Carta, the idea of a fifteenth century golden age of English labour and the English Civil War.¹³ Of course, English socialists such as Hyndman, Blatchford and William Morris, overwhelmingly reinforced this concentration on English rather than British history.¹⁴

This is not to say that non-English socialists gave up other identities. As Linda Colley has put it, 'identities are not like hats. Human beings can and do put on several at a time.'¹⁵ Keir Hardie could see himself as a socialist, a Scot, a Briton and an internationalist. Philip Snowden likewise saw himself as a socialist and internationalist, but also was proud to have been reared among 'a sturdy, honest,

11 The Co-operative movement is excluded. While it indulged in expressions of an oppositional Englishness, using 'Merrie England' rhetoric, giving its major newspaper the decidedly rural name of The Wheatsheaf, and setting up the Woodcraft Folk as part of its youth movement, it did not commit itself to political representation until 1917, and its relations with the Labour Party were not institutionalised within the period covered by this thesis. See Ross McKibbin, The Evolution of the Labour Party 1910-1924, Oxford UP, Oxford, 1974, pp.178-191.

12 For both, see David Howell, A Lost Left: Three Studies in Socialism and Nationalism, Manchester UP, Manchester, 1986.

13 James D. Young, 'A Very English Socialism and the Celtic Fringe 1880-1991,' History Workshop, no.35, 1993, p.137 notes the absence of the Scottish Covenanters in the 'really counterfeit concept of "the British radical-democratic tradition"'. See also Raphael Samuel, 'British Marxist Historians, 1880-1980,' New Left Review, no.120, 1980, pp.21-96.

14 There are of course difficulties in such simple definitions of nationality. Robert Blatchford, who used 'England for the English' as a slogan, was the son of Georgiana Louisa Corri, an Italian. The self-identity of individuals must be taken for granted.

15 Linda Colley, Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837, Yale UP, New Haven and London, 1992, p.6. See also E.J. Hobsbawm, Worlds of Labour, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1984, 'What is the Workers' Country?' pp.49-65.

blunt outspoken type' of people in Yorkshire.¹⁶ It is unlikely however that those who saw themselves as 'English' saw any difference between this and being British. J.B. Priestley simply said, 'When I say "English" I really mean British.'¹⁷

Patriotism and national identity do not only come into play with reference to relationships with other nations. Patriotism can be inward-looking too, and this element is more prominent on the left.¹⁸ The terms used to describe this inward-looking patriotism need to be defined. Englishness is the attribution of characteristics, habits, customs and traditions to the English as a people which makes them distinctive from other groups of people. Sometimes Englishness included other Britons within its terms, but sometimes it did not. What constitutes those assumptions is historically, culturally and politically shaped. Hence they can change over time and across the political spectrum. However, here, Englishness is usually taken to mean traditional or hegemonic views, whereas the term 'oppositional Englishness' is used where alternative assumptions, or the same assumptions leading to different conclusions, were taken up on the left.¹⁹ This alternative view of national-ness did involve an acceptance of the historical experience, memory, traditions, customs and habits of a defined territory, assigning to the inhabitants a character that involved more than simply the accident of birth within that territory. What distinguishes oppositional Englishness is that it usually looked towards the lower class experience, attempting to construct a democratic national identity. Two other terms also need definition. Radical patriotism is used to delineate the political uses to which love of country was put by those who did not simply accept government/state as being synonymous with the nation. It is the argument of this thesis that the mainstream of the British left, particularly the Labour Party, since they came to look on the state as the vehicle for social transformation, gave up radical patriotism while maintaining their patriotism. The definition of 'social patriotism' used here is that of Geoffrey Field: 'an inwardly focussed patriotism, one that is oriented toward domestic social reform and implies some kind of new

16 Philip Snowden, An Autobiography Volume One 1864-1919, Ivor Nicholson and Watson, 1934, p.2.

17 Postscripts, 1940, p.2, in Stephen Yeo, 'Socialism, the State, and Some Oppositional Englishness,' in Robert Colls and Philip Dodd, Englishness: Politics and Culture 1880-1920, Croom Helm, 1986, p.310.

18 See E. Green and M. Taylor, 'Further Thoughts on Little Englandism,' in Samuel (ed.), Patriotism I, pp.103-109. But see also Bernard Semmel, Imperialism and Social Reform: English Social-Imperial Thought 1895-1914, George Allen and Unwin, 1960, for the right and an inward-looking objective for imperialism.

19 Oppositional Englishness is the term used by Stephen Yeo, and adopted here.

and improved Britain'.²⁰ This usage has the advantage that the relationship between nation and state is put to one side. The majority of the British left accepted British democracy and saw the elected government, of whatever party, as legitimate. It therefore became increasingly difficult for them to be radically patriotic, opposing nation to government, but they could remain socially patriotic; that is, they could use arguments about their attachment to the nation as a force for social reform. Again social patriotism has not been the monopoly of the left. Lloyd George's 'homes fit for heroes' is a classic social patriotic phrase. In this sense, social patriotism means a reciprocal arrangement between classes where the ruling class offers social reform in return for patriotism. It was this class collaboration that Lenin attacked so bitterly, particularly when it was leaders of the working class who *offered* patriotism in return for social reform. He saw the victory of Bolshevism as a result of 'ruthlessly exposing the baseness and vileness of social-chauvinism and "Kautskyism" (to which Longuetism in France, the views of the Fabians and the leaders of the Independent Labour Party in Britain, of Turati in Italy, etc., correspond)'.²¹

That the patriotism of socialists was mainly inward-looking allowed a tolerance for other nations' patriotisms. Indeed international socialism was often seen as the only safeguard for national differences.²² A distinction was made between 'cosmopolitanism', which meant the disappearance of national differences, which was bad, and 'internationalism' which allowed the recognition of national differences.²³ Internationalism, it was felt, relied first on the acceptance of the idea of different nations. Internationalism did not mean anti-nationalism.²⁴ But from the mid-nineteenth century international rivalries and conflicts, as well as imperialism, made the idea of patriotism as possible among a multitude of nations living in peaceful coexistence seem inadequate. Ultimately, in 1914, the choice between socialism and patriotism had to be made. The attitudes of the British left to such events, and their discussion in terms of patriotism and national identity form a major part of this thesis.

20 Geoffrey Field, 'Social Patriotism and the British Working Class: Appearance and Disappearance of a Tradition,' International Labor and Working Class History, no. 41, 1992, p.21n.

21 V.I. Lenin, Selected Works in Three Volumes, vol. 3, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1964, p.298.

22 Part of the Webb's answer to the question 'What is Socialism?' in the New Statesman in 1913 was 'the maintenance of nationality by the growth of internationalism', New Statesman, 26 July 1913.

23 For example, R.C.K. Ensor's report for the Fabian Society in 1912 on the general strike to prevent war, see A.M. McBriar, Fabian Socialism and English Politics 1884-1918, Cambridge UP, 1962, pp.136-137.

24 For example, 'Social Democracy, Herveism, and Militarism,' Justice, 5 Oct 1907.

Ideas about national character were not only components in arguments for social and political reform. H.M. Hyndman, in England for All: The Textbook of Democracy, used ideas of Englishness to define how socialism in Britain would be achieved. Hyndman largely based England for All on a reading of Marx's Capital, but he acknowledged his debt only to 'a great and original thinker'.²⁵ He felt that Britons would not want to be taught by a German. This was no simple quirk of the xenophobic Hyndman, but only the first instalment in a continuing current on the British left of justifying their own socialism as in line with the English/British national character, history and political traditions. Against Marxism and anarchism in the 1880s and 1890s, syndicalism in the years before the First World War, and Bolshevism after 1917, British socialists used Englishness to denigrate these 'foreign' socialisms. Hence this thesis is also about the making of an authentic 'British Socialism', which proved its worth in 1924, when for the first time Labour formed the government of the nation. Again this links together with the end of radical patriotism as British Socialism came to accept the British state and its specific institutions as the sole legitimate vehicle for the (gradual) advance to socialism. The mainstream British left's notions of Englishness converged with more traditional notions.

In recent years there has been an increasing body of writing on English/British national identity and patriotism. Gerald Newman and Linda Colley have outlined differing views on the formation of English nationalism and Britishness respectively.²⁶ Both works, to use Newman's words, 'help to answer a modern need by investigating the process by which England's legendary "uniqueness", her "differentness" from continental society, arose from her very commonness with it'.²⁷ Despite uncovering differing motivations, they both show that, like foreign nationalisms, British nationalism was a contrivance with a political purpose. This theme has been the subject of other work, particularly in the 'invention of tradition' mode.²⁸ The hidden nature of nationalness in Britain has largely been the result of the perceived oldness of the nation. Patrick Wright has addressed the question of how this perception affects contemporary Britain, concluding that the obsession

25 H.M. Hyndman, England for All: The Textbook of Democracy, Harvester, Brighton, 1973, first published 1881, p.xxxviii.

26 Gerald Newman, The Rise of English Nationalism: A Cultural History 1740-1830, St Martin's Press, New York, 1987; Linda Colley, Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837.

27 Newman, The Rise of English Nationalism, p.xxi.

28 Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds.), The Invention of Tradition, Cambridge UP, Cambridge, 1983. See also Roy Porter (ed.), Myths of the English, Polity, Cambridge, 1992.

with 'National Heritage' is accompanied by a 'sense that history is foreclosed'.²⁹ Stanley Baldwin, who knew how to use this foreclosure to good effect, has been the subject of analysis.³⁰ While few other individual politicians have been the subject of such analysis, parties and politics have been.³¹ Individual symbols of nationhood have also received much attention. John Bull, Britannia, pearly kings and queens, the monarchy, English music, the police, and the countryside have all found their historians of patriotism.³² Much of the recent literature has also shown the variety of identities within the nation, and there has been work done on the relationship of different classes to patriotism.³³

The recognition that patriotisms exist, rather than simply patriotism, has led to examination of left-wing patriotism. Some labour historians have discovered this while researching individuals and institutions of the left. David Howell has recognised the patriotic motive behind the naming of the Independent Labour Party.³⁴ Kenneth Morgan and Austen Morgan have pointed out that Keir Hardie and Ramsay MacDonald sought to establish a national form of socialism.³⁵ The

- 29 Patrick Wright, On Living in an Old Country, Verso, 1985, p.70.
- 30 For example, Bill Schwarz, 'The Language of Constitutionalism: Baldwinite Conservatism,' in Formations of Nation and People, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984, pp.1-18.
- 31 For example, Robert Colls, 'Englishness and Political Culture,' pp.29-61 and Hugh Cunningham, 'The Conservative Party and Patriotism,' pp.283-307, in Colls and Dodd (eds.) Englishness; Hugh Cunningham, 'Jingoism in 1877-78,' Victorian Studies, vol. XIV, no. 4, 1971, pp.429-453; Frans Coetzee, For Party or Country: Nationalism and the Dilemmas of Popular Conservatism in Edwardian England, Oxford UP, Oxford, 1990.
- 32 For example, Miles Taylor, 'John Bull and the Iconography of Public Opinion in England, c.1712-1929,' Past and Present, no. 134, 1992, pp.93-128; Jeannine Surell, 'John Bull,' pp.3-25, Madge Dresser, 'Britannia,' pp.26-49, Raphael Samuel and Gareth Stedman Jones, 'Pearly Kings and Queens,' pp.64-71, all in Samuel (ed.), Patriotism Volume III National Fictions; Tom Nairn, The Enchanted Glass: Britain and Its Monarchy, Hutchinson Radius, 1988; Jeremy Crump, 'The Identity of English Music: The Reception of Elgar 1898-1935,' in Colls and Dodd, Englishness, pp.164-190; Alun Howkins, 'Greensleeves and the Idea of National Music,' in Samuel (ed.), Patriotism III, pp.89-98; David Cannadine, 'Gilbert and Sullivan: The Making and Un-Making of a British "Tradition",' pp.12-32, Clive Emsley, 'The English Bobby: An Indulgent Tradition,' pp.114-135, both in Porter (ed.) Myths of the English; Alun Howkins, 'The Discovery of Rural England,' in Colls and Dodd (eds.), Englishness, pp.62-88; Alex Potts, '"Constable Country" Between the Wars,' in Samuel (ed.), Patriotism III, pp.160-186.
- 33 J.H. Grainger, Patriotisms: Britain 1900-1939, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986; Samuel (ed.), Patriotism, 3 volumes. Richard Price, An Imperial War and the British Working Class, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972; Hugh Cunningham, The Volunteer Force, Croom Helm, 1975.
- 34 David Howell, British Workers and the Independent Labour Party 1888-1906, Manchester UP, Manchester, 1983, p.293.
- 35 Kenneth O. Morgan, Keir Hardie: Radical and Socialist, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1975, pp.203, 214; Austen Morgan, J. Ramsay MacDonald, Manchester UP, Manchester, 1987, chapters 1 and 2.

biographers of Robert Blatchford and H.M. Hyndman could not fail to discuss their patriotism.³⁶

Other historians have approached the left from the perspective of patriotism, as this thesis does. Christopher Hill's essay on the Norman Yoke was the pioneering study in this field. He set out to analyse how English radicals framed their radicalism with reference to the Norman Conquest, and also how this fitted in with the idea of lost rights, and as 'a rudimentary class theory of politics'.³⁷ It is this latter point that continued to give radical patriotism its resonance after the industrial revolution. It could cope with changing class structures because the inequalities remained. Hugh Cunningham's essay, 'The Language of Patriotism,' examined the survival of such language into the third quarter of the nineteenth century.³⁸ His analysis of the transfer of the dominance of the language of patriotism goes far to explain the left's defensiveness about patriotism. Cunningham's conclusion that, 'In the age of imperialism it was impossible to demarcate a patriotism of the left,'³⁹ may be substantially correct. However it underestimates the continuing and sustained efforts of many of those on the left to attempt to do so. Implicitly this thesis sets out to show this.

While there have been a few works upon individual incidents of left-wing patriotism in the period between the revival of socialism and 1939,⁴⁰ the Second World War has been seen as a period in which the left once more dominated patriotism, however briefly.⁴¹

There has been a neglect of the question of patriotism in the formative years of the modern British left. Stephen Yeo has drawn some useful conclusions from the period in his essay 'Socialism, the State and some Oppositional Englishness.' However, the strength of this essay also forms its weakness for the study of the left, patriotism and national identity. Yeo's interest lies in the relationship between

36 Laurence Thompson, Robert Blatchford: Portrait of an Englishman, Victor Gollancz, 1951; Chushichi Tsuzuki, H.M. Hyndman and British Socialism, Oxford UP, 1961.

37 Christopher Hill, 'The Norman Yoke,' in Puritanism and Revolution Studies in the Interpretation of the English Revolution of the 17th Century, Peregrine edition, Harmondsworth, 1986, p.65. The essay was first published in 1954.

38 Hugh Cunningham, 'The Language of Patriotism,' in Samuel (ed.), Patriotism I, pp.57-89.

39 Cunningham, 'Language of Patriotism,' p.82.

40 For example, Richard Gott, 'Little Englanders,' pp.90-102, and Green and Taylor, 'Further Thoughts on Little Englandism,' pp.103-109, in Samuel (ed.), Patriotism I.

41 Field, 'Social Patriotism and the British Working Class'. Taking this forward is Stephen Howe's 'Labour Patriotism, 1939-83,' in Samuel (ed.), Patriotism I, pp.127-139. Gregory Elliott's Labourism and the English Genius: The Strange Death of Liberal England?, Verso, London and New York, 1993 was published as this thesis neared completion. Elliott devotes three-quarters to, in his own word, a 'polemic' (p.xv) against Labourism after the period covered by this thesis.

forms of socialism and the state.⁴² Hence Yeo recognises that attitudes to the state were crucial in the relationships between the left and ideas of national identity, but since these attitudes to the state are the key point of the essay, Englishness enters mainly in its relationship to the British state. The formula that acceptance of the legitimacy of the state leads to an adherence to patriotism is axiomatic. It is also inadequate.⁴³ Radical patriotism could also express hostility to the state, for example in the opposition to conscription before and during the First World War expressed in a language claiming the rights of the freeborn Englishman against the imposition of a foreign yoke. Yet the strength of the formula is maintained, for as the mainstream British left was drawn into the state (or the potential to form part of the state), radical patriotism was displaced. Patriotism remained. The Attlee Cabinet agreed in October 1946 that the citizen in the welfare state had an obligation to undertake national service.⁴⁴ Another useful area that Yeo draws attention to is the discussion of the way in which collectivist socialism 'regarded itself as quite "English"'.⁴⁵ He cites an example of the distortion by Edward Pease, the Secretary of the Fabian Society, of a whole book by a commentator on socialism, Thomas Kirkup. Kirkup criticised those socialists 'too much influenced by the Prussian type of government and theory of the State', which he said was 'entirely opposed to English ideas'.⁴⁶ Pease edited the fifth edition of Kirkup's A History of Socialism in 1913. He left out Kirkup's concerns about Fabianism and the state. Kirkup's sarcastic criticism that, 'It is easier to get control over existing machinery than to make machinery yourself,' had its context changed to express a classic Fabian axiom on the state. He then privileged these ideas with the title of 'the English School of Socialism'.⁴⁷ This was an exceptional instance, but it was part of a wider process. It is necessary to expand greatly on this part of the process of the making and defence of a British Socialism.

To do this while also maintaining the implicit objective of showing and accounting for the continuing patriotic discourse on the left, it has been necessary to examine the British left over a relatively long period of time. Within the forty years covered

42 See also Stephen Yeo, 'Notes on Three Socialisms - Collectivism, Statism and Associationism - Mainly in Late-Nineteenth- and Early-Twentieth Century Britain,' in Carl Levy (ed.), Socialism and the Intelligentsia, Routledge and Kegan Paul/History Workshop, London and New York, 1987, pp.219-270.

43 Yeo does of course recognise this, quoting William Morris on 'an Englishman's wholesome horror of government interference and centralisation', 'Socialism, the State and Some Oppositional Englishness,' p.349.

44 Kenneth Harris, Attlee, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1982, pp.322-323.

45 Yeo, 'Socialism, the State and Some Oppositional Englishness,' p.358.

46 Yeo, 'Socialism, the State and Some Oppositional Englishness,' p.347.

47 Yeo, 'Socialism, the State and Some Oppositional Englishness,' pp.356-357.

it is felt that the measure of detail necessary to reach realistic and tenable conclusions has been achieved. Some incidents have therefore been treated as case studies. The timescale has also been necessary to allow for the danger that such patriotic language was simply the response to events that suited its use. When the response to contrasting situations is framed in similar terms of reference, it is possible to say that these are representative of deeper underlying attitudes and modes of thought. Understanding changes within a generic form of response is only possible within a fairly broad sweep of time.

The aim of this thesis has been to examine the outward-looking face of left politics on the one hand, and the internal (though often inter-party or sectarian) debates on the other. Public utterances, written and spoken, whether directed to potential supporters or political opponents within the labour movement, have been the basis of the research. Some of these utterances were made with deliberation, such as those books, articles and speeches which came closest to theorising on patriotism and national identity.⁴⁸ Equally important for the purposes of this thesis have been more ephemeral utterances. The propagandist use of newspapers, pamphlets and leaflets, and, for the period after 1906, parliamentary speeches, was the way in which the British left set out to present its public image. Advertisements in socialist publications, pamphlet covers and socialist songs have all proved important.

The long chronological period has also involved large debts to the researches of other historians, to provide background, illustrations and examples, and to point the way to interesting avenues of research. It is hoped that the footnotes and bibliography do justice to such indebtedness.

48 European socialists were more given to theory. For two recent books that cover both European theory, and at different levels, British practice, see Brian Jenkins and Günter Minnerup, Citizens and Comrades: Socialism in a World of Nation States, Pluto, 1984 and Schwarzmantel, Socialism and the Idea of the Nation.

Patriotism and Politics before 1881

Historically, patriotism and the political use of ideas of national identity have not been the monopoly of one class, party or social group, but have been the subjects of political struggle. But, in Britain, within that struggle the raw materials of interpretations of patriotism have resulted in largely similar expressions of patriotism and Englishness/Britishness. The period from the late eighteenth to the late nineteenth centuries witnessed the transfer of the dominance of ideas of patriotism from radical to conservative forces. This introductory chapter will examine that transfer.

Patriotism and the French Wars

In the late eighteenth century radicalism and patriotism were almost synonymous. Radical patriotism had a long history, stemming from ideas about an ancient constitution corrupted by the Norman Conquest.¹ The Norman Yoke theory claimed that Britain's rulers were foreign interlopers who had crushed a democratic Anglo-Saxon constitution. This idea had a remarkable resonance in the eighteenth century as the ruling elite sought to define their domestic authority by embracing cosmopolitan culture.² In 1771 Obadiah Hulme published his Historical Essay on the English Constitution in which he claimed that in Anglo-Saxon England elections for all power-holders had been annual. The Patriot, a radical paper, serialised the essay in 1792, and the London Corresponding Society used such arguments in its 'Address to the Nation' in 1797. Thomas Paine in Common Sense (1776) wrote of 'a French bastard landing with an armed banditti', hence, 'The antiquity of the English monarchy will not bear looking into'.³

Radicals also embraced a wider patriotism. In 1769 John Wilkes was described by his supporters as 'The Father of His Country; the English David; the Beloved Patriot ... the Martyr of Liberty'.⁴ Some members suggested that the London Corresponding

1 Christopher Hill, 'The Norman Yoke,' in Puritanism and Revolution, Peregrine, Harmondsworth, 1986, pp.58-125. See also Asa Briggs, Saxons, Normans and Victorians, Historical Association, Hastings and Bexhill, 1966.

2 Gerald Newman, The Rise of English Nationalism 1740-1830, St Martins, New York, 1987, chapter 2.

3 Hill, 'The Norman Yoke,' pp.99-101, 103.

4 Linda Colley, 'Radical Patriotism in the Eighteenth Century,' in Raphael Samuel (ed.), Patriotism Volume I History and Politics, Routledge, 1989, p.170.

Society should call itself the 'Patriotic Club'; in Norwich in 1795 there was another radical 'Patriotic Society'.⁵ These were based on more recent historical events, and in these other political forces could share. The English Civil War and the Glorious Revolution furnished ideas about God's Englishmen and the free-born Englishman. The settlement of 1688 had created a constitution of King, Lords and Commons, and this was inextricably linked with Protestantism.⁶ William Cobbett wrote in 1801, while still a government supporter, that 'our religion was that of the Church of England, to which I have ever remained attached; the more so, perhaps, as it bears the name of my country.'⁷

Religion united Britons against their Catholic neighbours, particularly France, against which wars were fought throughout the eighteenth century. The despotic tyranny of Roman Catholicism was contrasted with the liberty of Protestant Britain.⁸ Here was a broad point of agreement between government and reformers. The Laudable Association of Anti-Gallicans had impeccable radical credentials. Joseph Mawbey, the MP who presented Wilkes's election petition in 1769 was a member, for example. But the aims of the society, 'to promote British manufactures, and to extend the commerce of England and discourage the introduction of French modes', gave it little alternative but to side with governments against France when at war. Hence self-interest played a role in blunting the radical force of patriotism.⁹

The French Revolution spread anxiety among Britain's propertied classes. Edmund Burke in 1790 warned the House of Commons, and explained the totality of the threat of revolution:

The French had shown themselves the ablest architects of ruin that had hitherto existed in the world ... they had completely pulled down to the ground their monarchy; their church; their nobility; their law; their revenue; their army; their navy; their commerce; their arts; and their manufactures....¹⁰

When war broke out with the nation that had done this, British governments were forced to seek the active participation of the people. They sought to do this by suppressing dissent and by enlisting patriotism to the war effort. And it was to the language of radical patriotism that they turned. For example Pitt warned the nation in 1797 that it was 'against the very essence of your liberty, against the foundation

5 Hugh Cunningham, 'The Language of Patriotism,' in Samuel, Patriotism I, p.62.

6 Linda Colley, Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837, Yale UP, New Haven and London, 1992, chapter 1.

7 G.D.H. Cole, The Life of William Cobbett, W. Collins, 1924, p.16.

8 Colley, Britons, Introduction.

9 Colley, 'Radical Patriotism,' pp.172-175.

10 S. Maccoby, English Radicalism 1786-1832, George Allen and Unwin, 1955, p.32.

of your independence, against the citadel of your happiness, against the constitution itself that the French fought.¹¹ Old stereotypes of the French were remodelled. In place of Catholicism was put atheism. Both presented a threat to the Protestant religion. Rapaciousness, lawlessness, effeminacy and even thinness (to contrast with John Bull's stoutness from eating roast beef and plum pudding) were key elements. Above all, liberty was claimed as an essentially English virtue; one popular jingle ran 'Our fig tree is freedom, our vine is content / two blessings by nature for Frenchmen not meant.'¹² With Napoleon's coming to power, such ideas attained a wide currency. Cobbett in 1808, by now a radical, declared 'You must be satisfied that the French are, by nature, disqualified for the enjoyment of what we call freedom - that, in short, a Napoleon or some such master, they not only must have, but will have from choice.'¹³

The British elite also remade its lifestyle to make it appear more a part of the nation. Colley explains that

It needed to be able to repel suggestions that it was an exclusive and over-lavish oligarchy and legitimise its authority anew. Most of all, perhaps, its members needed to demonstrate to themselves as well as to others that they were authentically and enthusiastically British: to prove, as Edmund Burke put it, that 'a true natural aristocracy is *not* a separate interest in the state, or separable from it'.¹⁴

Hence Britain's elite sought to show that their homes and (mainly foreign) art collections belonged to the nation despite remaining in private ownership. French styles of address were abandoned. Functional clothing replaced wigs, powdered hair, silks and laces. Uniforms, showing the wearer's service to the nation, became popular. Paintings of military heroism were commissioned.¹⁵ George III, likewise, set out to become a national king. He opened up royal celebration to larger segments of the population. It was his suggestion that 250 sailors and marines be included in the victory parade of 1815. Royal celebration was made more sober and dignified, though more splendid.¹⁶ Unlike his grandfather and great grandfather, George III spoke English as a matter of course, and had been schooled in Bolingbroke's 'idea of the Patriot King', and hence accepted the Protestant idea of kingship. This enabled

11 Clive Emsley, British Society and the French Wars 1793-1815, Macmillan, 1979, p.64.

12 See Stella Cottrell, 'The Devil on Two Sticks: Franco-phobia in 1803,' in Samuel, Patriotism I, pp.265, 269.

13 Cole, Cobbett, p.143.

14 Colley, Britons, p.155.

15 Colley, Britons, pp.174-193.

16 Linda Colley, 'The Apotheosis of George III: Loyalty, Royalty and the British Nation 1760-1820,' Past and Present, no. 102, 1984, pp.110, 117.

him to become a symbol of Protestant Britain.

War with France, and particularly the threat of invasion, allowed the government and its supporters to brand dissent as disloyal. For example, the Anti-Jacobin Review in 1798 condemned Charles James Fox since 'while our gallant tars were employed in gathering laurels abroad, a factious demagogue was occupied in sowing the seeds of dissension at home.'¹⁷ Further to this, government powers to pass laws allowed radicals' actions to be legally defined as treasonable or seditious.¹⁸ Radicals were put on the defensive. Fox, in a speech in which he made a republican toast and condemned government measures in Ireland, said that he 'would be one of the first to aid in repelling any foreign enemy, under whatever government England might be'.¹⁹ Christopher Reid has explained the dilemma facing radical patriots in 1796-98:

To continue in a policy which could be construed as in the slightest degree pro-French was to invite accusations of disloyalty. Yet a readiness to unite with political antagonists in the defence of the realm might be interpreted as an admission of previous error and a conversion to the government's point of view.

Sheridan, the subject of Reid's essay, shifted the tone of his parliamentary speeches, displaying a pronounced hostility to the French Directory, an uninhibited expression of love of country and the suggestion of provisional support of the government for national defence purposes.²⁰ William Frend dedicated Patriotism; or, the Love of Our Country (1804) to the Volunteers, but attempted to maintain his radicalism. He argued that 'if elections were more frequent (annual would perhaps be the best), the numbers of voters enlarged, till by degrees it contained the whole nation at a certain age, the patriotism of the people would be in proportion increased.'²¹ This begins to sound very much like social patriotism.

The radical career of William Cobbett began only after the government tried to take over and monopolise patriotism. It does perhaps provide the best example of the continuing vitality of the radical patriotic tradition. In 1816 when Cobbett began publication of his Weekly Political Pamphlet he hoped it would lead many a father

17 Maccoby, English Radicalism, p.127.

18 Of course, juries could not always be relied upon to convict. See E.P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class, Pelican, Harmondsworth, 1980, pp.20-22 for the acquittals of Hardy, Thelwall and Tooke, three members of the London Corresponding Society.

19 Maccoby, English Radicalism, p.125.

20 Christopher Reid, 'Patriotism and Rhetorical Contest in the 1790s: The Context of Sheridan's *Pizarro*,' in Elizabeth Maslen (ed.), Comedy, Queen Mary and Westfield College, 1993, p.241.

21 Cunningham, 'Language of Patriotism,' p.65.

to 'be induced to spend his evenings at home instructing his children in the history of their misery, and in warming them into acts of patriotism'.²² He called his condemnations of post-war repression 'John Bull's Counterbuff'; and after the gagging acts in 1817 he wrote a seething pamphlet called The History of the Last Hundred Days of English Freedom.²³ To Cobbett this was not just a linguistic device. He embraced Englishness, championing 'manly' English sports, such as single-stick, in which 'the object is to break the opponent's head so that blood may run an inch'. He believed the decay of these sports would lead to national degeneracy. His home at Botley was described as 'a farm-house, and everything was in accordance with the largest idea of a great English yeoman of the old time'.²⁴ Cobbett also affected to look the part of a solid Englishman. Samuel Bamford described Cobbett 'dressed in blue coat, yellow swansdown waistcoat, drab jersey small-clothes, and top boots ... He was the perfect representation of what he always wished to be - an English gentleman-farmer.'²⁵

Chartism and English Rights

For all Cobbett's vitality, patriotism was no longer the monopoly of radicals. A plurality of patriotisms had emerged, often sharing much the same language but aiming for very different ends. Colley points out that 'almost all sectional interest groups in Britain resorted to nationalist language and activism to advance their claims to wider civic recognition.'²⁶

But patriotic language also remained a central way of expressing radical demands. Such language was used against the Whig reforms of the 1830s. Most particularly the language was used against the Metropolitan Police and the Rural Police Bills. Matthew Fletcher, in a printed address to the people of Bury in 1839, urged resistance to the Rural Police Bill, which was a 'fresh outrage on ENGLISH RIGHTS and English Feelings'. He defied the Home Secretary, the millowners 'and their servants the magistrates, to bend the "stubborn [*sic*] English zeal" of the men of Bury to so degrading a yoke'.²⁷ At the Chartist General Convention of March 1839

22 Cunningham, 'Language of Patriotism,' p.67.

23 Cole, Cobbett, pp.201, 219. The pamphlet was republished in 1921 by the Labour Publishing Company with an introduction by J.L. Hammond.

24 Cole, Cobbett, pp.102, 98.

25 Thompson, Making of the English Working Class, p.829.

26 Colley, 'Whose Nation? Class and National Consciousness in Britain 1750-1830,' Past and Present, no. 113, 1986, p.116. See also Gerald Newman, 'Anti-French Propaganda and British Liberal Nationalism in the Early Nineteenth Century: Suggestions toward a General Interpretation', Victorian Studies, vol. 18, no. 4, 1975, pp.385-418, which argues that the liberal middle class sought to promote their own values through anti-foreign and patriotic language.

27 Dorothy Thompson, The Early Chartists, Macmillan, London and Basingstoke, 1971, pp.73-81.

a resolution suggested that the government:

had no other object than to carry out that vile system of centralization, which they had been gradually drawing around the country, and having deprived Englishmen, by the most insidious means, of the reality of their freedom, now to take from them even the semblance of their freedom ... Since the Whigs had been in power, they had struck more and deeper at the liberties of Englishmen than the Tories, throughout the whole of their career...²⁸

The same kind of language was used to support a wide range of demands, from the points of the Charter;²⁹ to women's rights - one group of female Chartists called themselves the East London Female Patriotic Association³⁰ - to the right to arm in support of their constitutional demands.³¹

Newspaper descriptions of Chartist demonstrations show that their banners included ideas of nationality and traditional rights. A procession at Kersal Moor in September 1839 was led by the Manchester Political Union banner:

showing on one side a figure of Justice, holding in her hand a balance, supported by the British Lion, the emblems of Wisdom, Unity, Peace, and Strength, surmounted by a British Standard. [It was followed by] the Red Rose of England, Harp of Erin, Thistle of Scotland [and two union jacks].

Further along was another political union banner with:

Britannia seated on a rock, trampling on the chains of despotism, holding in her right hand the trident of Neptune, surmounted by a cap of liberty, and in her left hand the 'People's Charter', while the British lion rouses itself to maintain the Charter; the following motto in a semi-circle over her head, - 'For a nation to be free, 'tis sufficient that she wills it'.

On the reverse of this banner was 'England expects every man, THIS DAY will do his duty'.³² Two years later, another Chartist rally, this time to celebrate the release of two Chartists from prison, was well attended because 'the noble and patriotic defence made by the Doctor [MacDouall] on his trial had won him the respect and admiration of every lover of his country.' Mr Wheeler, in his address to MacDouall (one of the released men), declared that 'by making you thus welcome, we would

28 F.C. Mather, Chartism and Society: An Anthology of Documents, Bell and Hyman, 1980, pp.57-62.

29 Northern Star, 5 June 1841, in Hill, 'The Norman Yoke', p.58 and McDouall's Chartist and Republican Journal, 8 May 1841, in Mather, Chartism and Society, pp.53-4.

30 Mather, Chartism and Society, p.115. See also R.J. Richardson's The Rights of Women, in Thompson, Early Chartists, pp.115-127.

31 Northern Liberator, July 1839, The Operative, 10 Feb 1839, in Thompson, Early Chartists, pp.135-6, 185; Northern Star, 9 Apr 1839, in Mather, Chartism and Society, pp.63-67.

32 Northern Star 29 Sept 1838, in Mather, Chartism and Society, pp.241-243. The cap of liberty shows the coincidence of the French Revolution as an influence alongside images of England.

show our tyrants our love of patriotism and hatred of oppression.... Go on, then brave and noble patriot! Yours is no party struggle, it is a struggle to rescue our common country from a worse than Egyptian bondage.'³³

Early Chartism therefore saw a flowering of radical patriotic language, since it fitted with the experiences of the politically excluded. But after the early years of Chartism such language declined, for as Hugh Cunningham has explained, 'as the crisis of 1839-40 passed, and as the slump of 1842 bit deep, the Chartist analysis of the present and future became more economic and social, more determined to dwell on the peculiarities of industrial capitalism rather than the peculiarities of the English.'³⁴

The use of a language of class had already been advancing,³⁵ even if Chartism remained tied to an analysis of society in terms of political exclusion.³⁶ The 1832 Reform Act was perceived by many of those excluded to have established the triumph of the middle class. The Poor Man's Guardian in 1833 remarked that

By that Bill, the government of the country is essentially lodged in the hands of the middle classes; we say the middle classes - for though the aristocracy have their share of authority, it is virtually absorbed in that of the middlemen who form the great majority of the constituency.³⁷

Michael Brock, historian of the Reform Act, while showing that the Act maintained the landed interest's influence, points out that 'a measure drawing a line between voters and voteless was bound to increase the class consciousness of the latter.'³⁸

The temporary withdrawal from the language of patriotism by radicals allowed other political forces to fill the vacated space, establishing a dominance which the left subsequently would not be able to overcome, except in a few rare instances. One major difficulty was that these other forces, as they had done in the 1790s, used much the same vocabulary as the radicals. As Cunningham has shown, it was the radicals' own internationalism that allowed ideas of English liberty to be taken over by governing forces.³⁹ Palmerston shared with such groups as the People's

33 Thompson, Early Chartists, pp.139-74. See also Cunningham, 'The Nature of Chartism', Modern History Review, vol. 1, no. 4, 1990, p.22, for a discussion of the Englishness of the banquet celebrating the release of these men.

34 Cunningham, 'Language of Patriotism,' p.70.

35 Asa Briggs, 'The Language of "Class" in early Nineteenth-Century England,' in Asa Briggs and John Saville (eds.), Essays in Labour History, Macmillan, London and Basingstoke, 1960, pp.43-73, remains the classic essay on this development.

36 Gareth Stedman Jones, 'Rethinking Chartism,' in Languages of Class, Cambridge UP, Cambridge, 1983, pp.90-178.

37 Stedman Jones, 'Rethinking Chartism,' p.105.

38 Michael Brock, The Great Reform Act, Hutchinson, 1973, p.321 and chapter 9 generally.

39 Cunningham, 'Language of Patriotism,' p.71.

International League, the idea that English freedom was a model for the countries of Europe to follow.⁴⁰ Palmerston took political advantage of this coincidence of belief to draw support in behind his foreign policy in support of liberal nationalisms abroad. Appealing directly to urban audiences, Palmerston stressed the idea of Britain's reputation resting on its freedom. The congratulatory motion on the Don Pacifico affair was tabled by a radical MP. Palmerston also worked the anti-Russianism of radicals during the Crimean War to his full advantage.⁴¹ Government and people were drawn together sufficiently for the formation of the Volunteer Force in 1859, and that large numbers of the corps wore Garibaldi-style uniforms suggests that membership could be seen as a progressive act.⁴²

After Chartism

From the 1860s governments, both Liberal and Conservative, made a concerted effort to make the nation a point of unity to overcome the divisions of class. Freda Harcourt sees the mid-1860s as a turning point not only in parliamentary history but also in social and imperial history, as governments attempted to respond to economic crisis and fear of the mob.⁴³

To face this crisis of confidence, governments from the late 1860s onward began to re-promote the monarchy as a symbol of national unity and greatness. David Cannadine has shown that the public image of the monarchy from the 1820s onwards had reached a low point by the 1870s. At George IV's coronation, prize-fighters had been employed to keep the peace among the distinguished guests. William IV had tried to dispense with his coronation altogether; Prince Albert's funeral at Windsor had been private. Queen Victoria's secluded widowhood had been much criticized. But 'between the late 1870s and 1914 ... there was a fundamental change in the public image of the British monarchy, as its ritual, hitherto inept, private and of limited appeal, became splendid, public and popular.'⁴⁴

40 Mather, Chartism and Society, pp.128-130.

41 E.D. Steele, Palmerston and Liberalism 1855-1865, Cambridge UP, Cambridge, 1991, pp.15, 20, 21.

42 Hugh Cunningham, The Volunteer Force, Croom Helm, 1975, pp.107-108.

43 Freda Harcourt, 'Disraeli's Imperialism, 1866-1868: A Question of Timing,' Historical Journal, vol. 23, no. 1, 1980, pp.87-109.

44 'The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual: The British Monarchy and the "Invention of Tradition", c.1820-1977', in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds.), The Invention of Tradition, Cambridge UP, Cambridge, 1983, pp.107-19, 120. However Roland Quinault, 'Westminster and the Victorian Constitution,' Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, 6th series, vol. II, 1992, pp.79-104, argues that the rebuilding of the Houses of Parliament after the 1834 fire exhibited a glorification of the monarch through their architecture. For example, the Victoria Tower, the House of Lords as the chamber of the monarch. Prince Albert was chairman of the commission supervising the interior decoration of the 'Westminster New Palace'.

Harcourt has in fact dated the moves to make political use of the monarchy to the 1860s. The visits to London by the Sultan of Turkey, the Viceroy of Egypt and a party of Belgian Volunteers in July 1867 had been turned into eighteen days of national pageantry and celebration. The Queen's opposition to ceremonial had been overcome.⁴⁵

However the success or otherwise of these events may be judged by the fact that republicanism peaked after them. When the Queen asked Parliament for a dowry for her daughter and an annuity for her son in 1871, George Trevelyan published a pamphlet asking 'What Does She Do With It?' The years between 1871 and 1874 saw the founding of eighty-four republican clubs.⁴⁶

Alongside the promotion of monarchy came the use of imperialism as a measure of national unification. Domestic factors were not the only motivation. Russia had annexed Tashkent in 1866 and then Bokhara and Samarkand, France under Napoleon III controlled Cochin China by 1867, and, more spectacularly, had begun to build the Egyptian Canal. Britain too had therefore to assert itself internationally. At a cost of £9 million, 12,000 troops were sent to Abyssinia in 1868. The stated aim was to release British captives, but the blaze of publicity that accompanied the expedition and the striking of a commemorative medal afterwards suggest its wider aims. Harcourt has pointed out that despite Gladstone's opposition to imperialism it was his government that sent Frere's mission to Zanzibar, buried Livingstone in Westminster Abbey and embarked on the Ashanti War. Harcourt's conclusion is that this imperialism was the result of conscious political decisions within both the Conservative and Liberal governments.⁴⁷

Cunningham has shown how one particular event was used by the Conservative Party for political advantage and to attach patriotism more firmly to it. The Jingo crowds of the early months of 1878 were organized by Conservatives.⁴⁸ Disraeli had been attempting both to assert England's strength in the world and to bind the concept of patriotism to the Conservative Party. In a speech in July 1866 he declared that England's

45 Freda Harcourt, 'The Queen, the Sultan and the Viceroy: A Victorian State Occasion', London Journal, vol. 5, no. 1, May 1979, pp.35-56. Further duties undertaken by the Queen at Gladstone's behest are described in Harcourt, 'Gladstone, Monarchism, and the "New" Imperialism, 1868-74,' Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History, vol. 14, no. 1, October 1985, pp.20-51.

46 Harcourt, 'Gladstone, Monarchism and "New" Imperialism', pp.27-28; Cannadine, 'The British Monarchy', p.119.

47 Harcourt, 'Disraeli's Imperialism', pp.100-4, 107, 109.

48 Hugh Cunningham, 'Jingoism in 1877-78,' Victorian Studies, vol. XIV, no. 4, 1971, pp.429-453.

abstention from any unnecessary interference in [Europe's] affairs is the consequence, not of her decline of power, but of her increased strength.... There is no Power, indeed, that interferes more than England. She interferes in Asia, ... in Australia, in Africa, and in New Zealand.⁴⁹

The following year, in a speech in Edinburgh, he told his audience that 'I have always considered that the Tory party was the national party of England.'⁵⁰ Disraeli believed organisation could enhance the party's grip on patriotism, and, in a publication for the National Union of Conservative and Constitutional Associations, wrote: 'I wish to impress on you that organisation is absolutely essential - that organisation is perfectly consistent with the highest sentiments of patriotism.'⁵¹ Disraeli played on the Russophobia of radicals, enabling his campaign to use the rhetoric of liberty. Hence he received the support of the Magna Charta Association's paper, the Englishman, which hoped anyone calling for peace would 'meet his just deserts'.⁵² However unsponaneous and ephemeral Jingoism was in 1877-78, it did succeed in frightening Liberals by investing patriotism with an irrational force.

But this should not be taken to mean that radical patriotism was totally eclipsed. Conservative forces achieved a dominance of the language of patriotism rather than its monopoly. The researches of a group of historians following Stedman Jones have sought to rescue mid-nineteenth century radicalism from obscurity, and have uncovered a rich vein of popular radicalism.⁵³ The most interesting of these currents

49 Harcourt, 'Disraeli's Imperialism', p.96.

50 Cunningham, 'Language of Patriotism,' p.74. The fact that the second quoted speech was in Scotland and yet referred to 'England' and not to Britain was not intended as a conscious snub to the Scots. England was often used when Britain was meant, and Scotland was often referred to as North Britain or even abbreviated to 'N.B.' This unconscious Anglo-centrism had gone so far that in November 1914 an advertisement in The Times urged 'Englishmen! Please use "Britain", "British", and "Briton", when the United Kingdom or the Empire is in question', it compromised however, '- at least during the war'. Quoted in Hugh Cunningham, 'The Conservative Party and Patriotism', in Robert Colls and Philip Dodd (eds.), Englishness: Politics and Culture 1880-1920, Croom Helm, 1986, p.294.

51 Cunningham, 'Jingoism in 1877-78,' p.448.

52 Cunningham, 'Jingoism in 1877-78,' p.444.

53 See Eugenio F. Biagini and Alistair J. Reid (eds.), Currents of Radicalism, Cambridge UP, Cambridge, 1991; see also Patrick Joyce, Visions of the People: Industrial England and the Question of Class 1848-1914, Cambridge UP, Cambridge, 1991; and Jon Lawrence, 'Popular Radicalism and the Socialist Revival in Britain,' Journal of British Studies, vol. 31, 1992, pp.163-186. It must be recognised that this 'current' of history does not have just historical aims. For example Biagini and Reid's conclusion to their introduction of Currents of Radicalism declares: 'It seems to us that the Labour Party's ability to play a leading role in broad progressive movements in the future will be strengthened if it becomes more restrained in its tendency to legitimise its policies primarily in relation to "socialism", and if it develops more self-consciousness of, and more pride in, its relation to currents of radicalism,' p.19.

is that of the Tichborne case.⁵⁴ In 1865 Tomas Castro, from Wagga Wagga in Australia, claimed to be Sir Roger Tichborne, heir to the estates of a Hampshire family, who had last been seen in 1854. In 1867 Castro met Dowager Lady Tichborne who recognised him as her son. When she died the following year the rest of the family disputed Castro's claim, and when one of Sir Roger's friends suddenly claimed that he had tattooed Sir Roger, Castro was tried for perjury and sentenced to fourteen years imprisonment. Castro's lawyer started a paper to argue the case. He chose the name the Englishman and the organisation formed to defend the claimant called itself the Magna Charta Association. McWilliam has called this the largest single agitation between Chartism and the revival of independent labour politics, and the Englishman's circulation of about 70,000 in 1875 supports this view.⁵⁵ The agitation drew upon the tradition of the ideas of the free-born Englishman and independence, invoking the names of Hampden and Milton, but its key concept and phrase was of 'fair play'.

Yet despite the Tichborne case, by the late 1870s the language of patriotism had become dominated by conservative political forces, and parties saw the advantages of taking up such language. The late nineteenth century was the age of 'new' imperialism, and patriotism, and ideas of Englishness increasingly came to be used to justify the territorial 'expansion of England'. This language bore a striking resemblance to the radical patriotic vocabulary. From the late nineteenth century the output of patriotic propaganda from governments, political parties, imperial and military publicists and voluntary organisations of all sorts was massive.⁵⁶ And it was into this situation that socialist and independent labour politics re-emerged.

54 Rohan McWilliam, 'Radicalism and Popular Culture: The Tichborne Case and the Politics of "Fair Play", 1867-1886,' in Biagini and Reid, Currents of Radicalism, pp.44-64.

55 McWilliam, 'The Tichborne Case,' pp.44-45, 50.

56 See particularly, J.M. MacKenzie, Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880-1960, Manchester UP, Manchester, 1984; J.M. MacKenzie (ed.), Imperialism and Popular Culture, Manchester UP, Manchester, 1986; J.H. Grainger, Patriotisms Britain 1900-1939, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986.

Socialism and Oppositional Englishness 1881-1906

England arise! the long night is over,
Faint in the east behold the dawn appear,
Out of your evil dream of toil and sorrow
A-rise O England, for the day is here
From your fields and hills,
Hark! the answer swells
A-rise O England, for the day is here!

By your young children's eyes so red with weeping,
By their white faces aged with wanton fear,
By the dark cities where your babes are creeping,
Naked of joy and all that makes life dear;
From each wretched slum
Let the loud cry come;
A-rise O England, for the day is here!

People of England! all your valleys call you,
High in the rising sun the lark sings clear,
Will you dream on, let shameful slumber thrall you?
Will you disown your native land so dear?
Shall it die unheard -
That sweet pleading word?
A-rise O England, for the day is here!

... Forth, then, ye heroes, patriots, and lovers!
Comrades of danger, poverty, and scorn!
Mighty in faith of freedom your great mother!
Giants refreshed in joy's new-rising morn!
Come and swell the song,
Silent now so long:
England is risen! - and the day is here.¹

From its establishment in the early 1880s, modern socialism in Britain has concerned itself with ideas about national character and a 'real' England. 'England, Arise!' Philip Snowden recalled, was one of the favourite 'hymns' sung at early Independent Labour Party meetings.² It was sung at the first Labour Church service in 1891.³ It was sung at the celebration for the twenty-nine Labour MPs elected in

1 Edward Carpenter (ed.), Chants of Labour: A Song Book of the People, Swann Sonnenschein, 1888, pp.18-19.

2 Philip Snowden, An Autobiography Volume I 1864-1919, Ivor Nicholson and Watson, 1934, p.73.

3 Laurence Thompson, Robert Blatchford: Portrait of an Englishman, Victor Gollancz, 1951, pp.79-80.

1906.⁴ It was sung to welcome Keir Hardie home after his world tour of 1907-1908.⁵

'England, Arise!' was written by Edward Carpenter in a socialist café in a northern industrial city. Unable to endure an 'insuperable *feeling* of falsity and dislocation', Carpenter had left Cambridge University and the Church of England, to become a university extension lecturer in Sheffield.⁶ There he came into contact with a strong radical tradition, meeting, for example, the freethinker and ex-Chartist, Joseph Sharpe.⁷ This was almost certainly one source of British socialists' espousal of radical patriotism. Many socialists came from the radical tradition. The Social Democratic Federation had direct links with radicalism. Its forerunner, the Democratic Federation, was a radical organisation. Its programme had been approved of by the Magna Charta Association.⁸ Prominent figures in the SDF had links with the radical tradition. Jack Williams, one of the 'old guard' of the SDF, had been involved in the Tichborne agitation. Harry Quelch had been in the Southwark Radical Club. J. Hunter Watts said his journey to socialism had taken him through radicalism and 'Republicanism ... of a sturdy kind'.⁹ Many prominent figures in the ILP and Labour Party had come through Liberal Radicalism. George Lansbury was a Liberal election agent before taking most of Bow and Bromley Liberal and Radical Association into the local SDF and later into the Labour Party.¹⁰

'England, Arise!' also reveals another element in early British socialism that had a profound effect upon the tone of radical patriotism. This was the idea of socialism as a new life.¹¹ This formed a break with mid-century radicalism, for it no longer accepted industrial capitalism as inevitable. This qualitative change was extremely

4 Programme for the Reception of Labour MPs, 15 February 1906, Royal Horticultural Hall, Westminster.

5 Souvenir of the Welcome Home Demonstration to Greet J. Keir Hardie MP, on his return from his World Tour, Royal Albert Hall, 5 April 1908. The victory rally to celebrate the election of the first majority Labour government in 1945 also sang 'England, Arise!', and it was even sung at meetings of the Young Communist League in the 1960s. Kenneth Harris, *Attlee*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1982, pp.263-264; Sheila Rowbotham, 'In Search of Carpenter,' *History Workshop*, no. 3, 1977, p.129.

6 Edward Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams*, George Allen and Unwin, 1916, p.58.

7 Sheila Rowbotham and Jeffrey Weeks, *Socialism and the New Life: The Personal and Sexual Politics of Edward Carpenter and Havelock Ellis*, Pluto, 1977, pp.36-38.

8 M.S. Wilkins, 'The Non-Socialist Origins of Britain's First Important Socialist Organization,' *International Review of Social History*, vol. IV, 1959, pp.199-207, 205. See also Jon Lawrence, 'Popular Radicalism and the Socialist Revival in Britain,' *Journal of British Studies*, vol. 31, 1992, pp.175-179.

9 Harry Quelch (ed.), *How I Became a Socialist*, Twentieth Century Press, n.d. 1902? pp.37, 72, 28-29. See also Rohan McWilliam, 'Radicalism and Popular Culture: The Tichborne Case and the Politics of "Fair Play", 1876-1886, in Eugenio F. Biagini and Alistair J. Reid (eds.), *Currents of Radicalism*, Cambridge UP, Cambridge, 1991, p.62.

10 Jonathan Schneer, *George Lansbury*, Manchester UP, Manchester, 1990, pp.7-20.

11 See Stephen Yeo, 'A New Life: The Religion of Socialism in Britain, 1883-1896,' *History Workshop*, no. 4, 1977, pp.5-56.

powerful. Even Fabian Essays, supposed bible of gradualism, contains conjectures about what socialist society would be like.¹² In the preface to Socialist Songs, John Bruce Glasier noted the 'frequency of the use of metaphors, "dawn", "morning", "day", and the like, in these pages, as emblematic of the promise of Socialism'.¹³ Socialism was talked about in millenarian terminology. Snowden called it 'the Christ that is to be'.¹⁴ Carpenter explained how history would proceed under this belief. 'It can hardly be doubted,' he wrote, 'that the tendency will be ... towards a return to nature and community of human life. This is the way back to the lost Eden, or rather forward to the New Eden, of which the old was only a figure.'¹⁵

This search for Eden was associated with the idea of a past lost to industrialisation and urbanisation.¹⁶ This was part of 'Back to the Land' and 'Simple Life' impulses which went wider than just the socialist movement.¹⁷ Middle class socialists could take this literally, physically moving 'back' to the land. Many London Fabians took houses in the country. The Oliviers and Peases moved to the North Downs.¹⁸ Charlotte Wilson, Fabian anarchist, bought 'a charming and idyllic little farm'.¹⁹ Ramsay MacDonald and his wife bought a weekend cottage in Buckinghamshire, where they grew roses and vegetables, and designed a miniature tour for visitors, 'which should display the pages of national history written in their neighbourhood', taking in Stoke Poges churchyard, where Gray wrote his 'Elegy', Milton's cottage at Chalfont St Giles, and Great Hampden Church where Puritan soldiers had buried John Hampden.²⁰ Carpenter bought a smallholding at Millthorpe near Sheffield with

12 See for example Annie Besant's essay, 'Industry under Socialism,' Fabian Essays in Socialism, Fabian Society, 1920, first published 1889.

13 J. Bruce Glasier (ed.), Socialist Songs, Labour Literature Society, Glasgow, 1893, p.3.

14 The title of one of his, often repeated meetings, published as a pamphlet by the ILP, c.1905.

15 Edward Carpenter, Civilisation: Its Cause and Cure, fifth edition, Swann Sonnenschein, 1897, first published 1889, p.35.

16 The left's appropriation of Blake's 'Jerusalem' is an excellent example of this, with its reference to 'dark satanic mills'. However Hubert Parry did not set it to music until 1916 (to steel the British against a premature peace), and it was not generally taken up by the left until the 1920s. James Leatham did include the final verse ('I will not cease from mental fight,/ Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand/ Till we have built Jerusalem/ In England's green and pleasant land.') as 'A Resolve' in Labour's Garland, being Poems for Socialists, Twentieth Century Press, n.d. 1894?, p.32. Surprisingly it was not sung at a Labour Party conference until 1990, when Jo Richardson, chairing, said that 'those delegates who are Scottish have dispensation to insert the word Scotland, instead of England, and the same goes for Wales, leaving the rest of us to uphold the old country.' Labour Party, Conference Report, 1990, p.332.

17 See Jan Marsh, Back to the Land: The Pastoral Impulse in Britain from 1880 to 1914, Quartet, 1982; Peter C. Gould, Early Green Politics, Back to Nature, Back to the Land and Socialism in Britain 1880-1900, Harvester, Brighton, 1988.

18 Norman and Jeanne MacKenzie, The First Fabians, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977, p.99.

19 Edith Nesbit quoted in Martin J. Wiener, English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit 1850-1980, Cambridge UP, Cambridge, 1981, p.72.

20 Lord Elton, The Life of James Ramsay MacDonald (1866-1919), Collins, 1939, pp.126-127.

a 'charming brook running at the foot of my three fields, the beautiful wooded valley, and the close proximity, a mile or so off, of the open moors.'²¹

Most socialists could not move from town to country. They therefore sought relief from alienation in fellowship. The socialist movement abounded with groups that were committed to the Morris axiom 'Fellowship is life and lack of fellowship is death.'²² Many of these were grouped around the Clarion newspaper edited by Robert Blatchford. Blatchford was born in 1851, the son of a strolling comedian and Italian actress. At twenty he joined the army, leaving in 1877 with the rank of sergeant. In 1885 he became a journalist, after having taught himself writing style from others' books. 'I like best the language that is nearest to pure Saxon,' he wrote, 'My favourites are the Bible, the Book of Common Prayer, Shakespeare, Milton, Swift, Defoe, Thackeray.'²³ In 1889 he announced his conversion to socialism, and after being sacked by the Sunday Chronicle, less because of his socialism than for the time he gave to his candidature in Bradford and the production of an opera,²⁴ he and other ex-Chronicle journalists set up the Clarion in December 1891.

Logie Barrow has described the strategy of the Clarion as 'educationalist', by which he means 'a belief or assumption that "education of the people" (or a majority, however defined) is not only a necessary precondition for whatever social or political changes one sees oneself as working towards (this is so within all strategies, save the most spontaneous), but will also *suffice* to bring these about.'²⁵ This required, therefore, that the Clarion raise the consciousness of its readers, and its success was in large part due to a heightened consciousness already created by the socialist groups of the 1880s. Hyndman spoke highly of Blatchford's achievement; he had given socialism 'a tremendous push forward in the North of England ... I find his converts in every direction.'²⁶ To achieve the 'educationalist' strategy the Clarion had to be more than just a newspaper, and certainly in the early years it succeeded. Alexander M. Thompson, who left the Chronicle with Blatchford, said of the years up to 1895, 'We were part of a community. We shared the lives of our readers.'²⁷ This was achieved by making the Clarion the centre of a network of

21 Carpenter, My Days and Dreams, p.111.

22 J. Bruce Glasier, William Morris and the Early Days of the Socialist Movement, Longmans Green, 1921, p.35.

23 Thompson, Robert Blatchford, p.41.

24 Thompson, Robert Blatchford, p.77.

25 Logie Barrow, The Socialism of Robert Blatchford and the *Clarion*, 1889-1918, Unpublished PhD thesis, University of London, 1975, p.62.

26 Clarion, 5 March 1892 in Henry Pelling, The Origins of the Labour Party 1880-1900, second edition, Oxford UP, Oxford, 1966, p.97

27 Barrow, The Socialism of Robert Blatchford, p.52.

readers' activities, from selling the Clarion or Merrie England, to feeding working-class children through the Cinderella Clubs. Some of the activities were purely for recreation and personal development, such as the camera clubs, or Clarion Field Clubs, which were 'to bring the town dweller more frequently into contact with the beauty of nature; to help forward the ideal of the simpler life, plain living and high thinking.'²⁸ Others were set up to spread propaganda, such as the Clarion Scouts. The role of the Scouts was explained in their song:

... Down to the haunts of the parson and squire
 Putting opponents to rout;
 Bestriding his steed with a pneumatic tyre.
 Through village and hamlet, through mud and through mire
 Rideth the Clarion Scout.
 Nailing down lies and disposing of fables
 Improving the landscape by sticking up labels ...
 What is the message they bring? ...
 A Gospel of Brotherhood - that's what they preach ...
 They say that all produce belongs to the toiler
 To sweep from old England each idler and spoiler
 Abolish the sweater, the rack renting knave
 The land for the people, the just and the brave ...²⁹

Singing seems to have been crucial to the early socialists. The songs they sang often appealed to radical patriotism. Songs (or poems put to music) could be drawn from a past radical tradition,³⁰ a favourite being Shelley's 'Song to the Men of England'.³¹ Songs could combine class and radical patriotism, such as Jim Connell's 'Workers of England', which ended 'Labour shall triumph and England be free.'³² Another socialist song appealing to patriotism was Henry Salt's 'The True Patriotism'. This contrasted jingoistic patriotism with the socialist's patriotism:

To help the weak with dauntless hand;
 To humble the despotic;-
 This is true love of fatherland,
 This, this is patriotic.³³

- 28 Scout, 30 March 1895, in David Prynne, 'The Clarion Clubs, Rambling and the Holiday Association in Britain since the 1890s,' Journal of Contemporary History, vol. 11, 1976, p.68.
- 29 Scout, May 1895, in Prynne, 'The Clarion Clubs,' p.68. Adverts for bicycles appeared in the Clarion every week.
- 30 Chris Waters, British Socialists and the Politics of Popular Culture, 1884-1914, Manchester UP, Manchester, 1990, p.111.
- 31 Carpenter (ed.), Chants of Labour, pp.46-47; Glasier (ed.), Socialist Songs, pp.65-66; Harry Henshall (ed.), The I.L.P. Song Book, Labour Press and Clarion, London and Manchester, n.d. 1897?, p.13.
- 32 Carpenter (ed.), Chants of Labour, p.78. This was sung to an air by Purcell. Connell, an Irishman, was the author of 'The Red Flag'.
- 33 Carpenter (ed.), Chants of Labour, pp.80-81.

Along the same lines was 'A Call to England's Youth', from The Child's Socialist Reader, published by the SDF, and sung to the tune of 'Onward Christian Soldiers':

Rouse ye, youth of England
There is work to do,
And your country's calling,
Calling loud for you;
Yours to make its future
Truly great and free.
Up, then, youth of England
Men that are to be.³⁴

Some socialists were enthusiasts for English music. Here again the components of radical patriotism could be drawn upon. The search for folk song involved an appreciation of 'the common people' in a national context.³⁵ Cecil Sharp and Vaughan Williams, who both described themselves as socialists, went in search of an authentic national music.³⁶ But Sharp and Vaughan Williams were professional musicians before they were socialists. Many who would have considered themselves socialists first and musicians only second also involved themselves in folksong and English music of the sixteenth and seventeenth century.³⁷ The interest in a national music necessarily involved some discussion of the English character, since 'it may be assumed that typical English music must speak a language the English people can feel and understand,' as Montagu Blatchford explained. He then went on to define the English:

By the English people I don't mean the dukes, the polo-playing cavalry men, the professional politicians, the 'smart set', the millionaires of Park Lane, the Jews of Houndsditch, nor the costers or slumworkers of Whitechapel. I mean the jolly business men, the grave professional men, the tradesmen and shopkeepers, skilled mechanics and artificers; the rank and file of the industrious classes upon whom the country depends. The good homely sensible, illogical, cheerful, simple people; who

34 The Child's Socialist Reader, Twentieth Century Press, 1907, pp.86-87. Other examples using almost identical language can be found in The Labour Church Hymn Book, Labour Church Institute, Manchester, 1892, pp.3, 11, 23.

35 Waters, British Socialists and Popular Culture, pp.103, 127-128.

36 Alun Howkins, 'Greensleeves and the Idea of National Music,' in Raphael Samuel (ed.), Patriotism Volume III National Fictions, Routledge, 1989, pp.89-98. See Dave Harker, 'May Cecil Sharp be Praised?' History Workshop, no. 14, 1982, pp.44-62, for criticisms of Cecil Sharp's methodology (and politics). These however detract little from his motives of searching for 'our traditional songs', which would be 'a great instrument for sweetening and purifying our national life', p.55.

37 Those who took an active part in the socialist choral movement, could find their socialism submerged. Waters has analysed the sheet music of the Halifax and Bradford branches of the Clarion Vocal Union. Only 4.3 per cent of it was political, whereas 16.3 per cent was traditional folk and 11.4 per cent was English sixteenth and seventeenth century music. Waters, British Socialism and Popular Culture, p.122. See also Dave Russell, Popular Music in England, 1840-1914 A Social History, Manchester UP, Manchester, 1987, pp.52-53.

are slow to anger and of long patience; the people who think rightly and act rightly, so far as they know how.³⁸

In looking for a national music, Blatchford showed the dangers for socialists. He looked for the common English people, and included groups who sit unhappily with the idea of class, yet excluded working-class immigrants in the East End.

Music was an important element in the personal comradeship of the socialist movement, 'it was a means of binding together small groups who were pitted against the world outside but more than this the early socialists saw music, poems and the artistry of their banners as the beginnings of a new culture.'³⁹ This new culture was seen as democratic, but it was also seen as part of a national culture. The strength of it was based upon a historical interpretation of the English past.⁴⁰

Merrie England in the Past

Largely based on the historical work of Thorold Rogers, the socialists came to see capitalism bringing an absolute decline in the standard of living of the vast majority of the English people.⁴¹ It would seem that socialists not only saw a future socialist society as a new life, but also believed that the English past had been of the nature of the 'new life' and that capitalism had disrupted that life. Hyndman's England for All: The Textbook of Democracy, written in 1881 and handed out to delegates at the founding conference of the Democratic Federation, looked back to the fifteenth century as an age of English glory, when:

the mass of people of these islands were in their most prosperous and wholesome condition.... The men who fought in the French wars, and held their own against every Continental army, were sober, hardworking yeomen and lifeholders.... They owned the soil and lived out of it, and having secured for themselves power at home and freedom at their own firesides, they kept them.

The fifteenth century was the golden age of agricultural England...Such day-labourers as there were, lived in perfect freedom, owned plots of land themselves, and shared in the enormous common land which then lay free and open to all.... The feudal lords who maintained around them crowds of retainers were at this time merely the heads of a free, prosperous society, which recognized them as their natural leaders alike in war and peace.... Their sturdy freedom was based on property and good living.... This was merrie England, in short - merrie, that is for Englishmen as a whole, not merely for the landlords and capitalists at the top, who

38 'On English Music,' Clarion, 7 July 1905. Montagu was Robert Blatchford's brother.

39 Rowbotham and Weeks, Socialism and the New Life, p.65.

40 English rather than British, since the periods considered by socialists usually pre-dated the acts of union with Wales in 1536 and Scotland in 1707.

41 A. Dwight Culler, The Victorian Mirror of History, Yale UP, New Haven and London, 1985, pp.154-155, points out that differing views of English history could be drawn out depending on which part of the past was invoked. The Whig view of William Stubbs, E.A. Freeman and J.R. Green looked to the Anglo-Saxons with their folkmoot and witenagemot as the cradle of English liberties. The conservative view looked back to the Normans. It is the socialist view that is discussed here.

live in ease on the fruits of their labour. For a day-labourer, a plain, unskilled hand - with his geese, and sheep, and cow on the common - could then get something for his day's work ...⁴²

In his The Historical Basis of Socialism in England, Hyndman entitled the first chapter, about the fifteenth century, 'The Golden Age of the People'. He described it as a time when 'labourers ... ate, drank, and worked well, and foreigners gazed in wonder at the rich clothing, sturdy frames, and independent mien of our English common men'.⁴³ With William Morris, he described fourteenth century England as 'inhabited by perhaps the most vigorous, freedom-loving set of men the world ever saw'.⁴⁴

Morris had been a medievalist before becoming a socialist. 'The study of history and the love and practice of art,' Morris wrote, 'forced me into a hatred of the civilization which, if things were to stop as they are, would turn history into an inconsequent nonsense.'⁴⁵ In Marxism, he found a theory that explained both the degradation of the relationship between art and the people, through the alienation of the people from the means of production, and the way to restore the relationship that enabled everything produced to be a work of art. He contrasted the medieval workman, who worked in his own time, determining and designing what he himself would make (and even if he lived in a town, 'the fields and sweet country come close up to his house') with the nineteenth-century workman who, if a master chooses that he works at all, must be at the factory when the bell rings, and lives in a 'sweltering dog-hole, with miles and miles of similar dog-holes between him and the fair fields of the country, which in grim mockery is called "his"'.⁴⁶ Capitalism and industrialism, he argued, had changed England and the English people completely.

I must ask you to believe [he urged an audience] that gradual as the change in England has been since the time of Edward III, it has been complete; that in spite of our counties and cities being called by the same names, and that although not one new parish has been added to the English parishes since the time of the heptarchy, though there is seeming continuity in our history, yet it fares with us as with the

42 H.M. Hyndman, England for All: The Textbook of Democracy, Harvester, Brighton, 1973, pp.7-9. The phrase 'merrie England' dates back to about 1300, when it was already being used to signify a world that had passed with the Norman Conquest. John Caius, physician to Edward VI and founder of the Cambridge college, used it in 1552, referring to 'the old world when this countrie was called Merry England'. Spenser in The Faerie Queene wrote of 'Saint George of mery England'. It would seem that Merrie England was always a time that had passed. See Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs, third edition, Oxford UP, Oxford, 1970.

43 H.M. Hyndman, The Historical Basis of Socialism, Kegan Paul Trench, 1883, p.2.

44 H.M. Hyndman and William Morris, A Summary of the Principles of Socialism, Modern Press, 1884, p.13.

45 The Collected Works of William Morris Volume XXIII, Longmans Green, 1915, 'How I Became a Socialist', 1894, p.280.

46 'Architecture and History', Works XXII, pp.312-313.

Irishman's knife, the same knife but with new blades and a new handle: in morals and aspirations, in manners of work and life, the English people of to-day are totally different from what they were in the fifteenth century; 300 years has made them another people with little sympathy for the virtues, and no understanding of the vices of their ancestors.⁴⁷

Directly influenced by Hyndman and Morris was John Ward, elected MP for Stoke in 1906. In a pamphlet he pictured the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries:

England was the garden of the west, when those hills surrounding Sheffield were garlanded with fragrant verdance, and profusely decorated by the unconscious hands of nature. Then the spring was a herald of joy, the playful lambs romping upon the hill-side, the melodious music of the lark, the waving green fields, the sweet perfume of the flower-strewn woodlands, brought a message of peace to the soul, and excited happy and noble thoughts in the minds of men.⁴⁸

Others describing the fifteenth century as the 'golden age of labour' include T.D. Benson and Keir Hardie, the latter describing 'every departure of whatever kind from the pastoral simplicity which characterised the even tone of the lives of the men of old' as 'a burden and a curse'.⁴⁹ An article by Blatchford in the Clarion about wages in the fifteenth century is entitled 'The Happy Villagers of Merry England';⁵⁰ the spelling was changed to the more archaic-sounding 'Merrie England' for the articles and book of that name.⁵¹

So why was England no longer 'merrie'? The base of the problem was put in simple terms: 'At present Britain does not belong to the British: it belongs to a few of the British.... It is because Britain does not belong to the British that a few are very rich and the many are very poor.'⁵² The question of the ownership of land

47 'At a Picture Show', 1884, in May Morris, William Morris: Artist, Writer, Socialist II, pp.414-415. See also William Morris and E. Belfort Bax, Socialism: Its Growth and Outcome, Swann Sonnenschein, 1893, p.122.

48 John Ward, England's Sacrifice to the God Mammon, Wandsworth SDF, n.d. 1890?, p.9.

49 See T.D. Benson, A Socialist's View of the Reformation, Labour Leader, London and Glasgow, n.d., c.1902, p.4; Keir Hardie, Young Men in a Hurry Labour Leader, London and Glasgow, n.d. c.1896, p.4; see also J. Keir Hardie, From Serfdom to Socialism Harvester, Brighton, 1974, first published 1907, chapter 5.

50 Clarion, 10 March 1894.

51 See also E.F. Fay's 'A Song of "Merrie England"' in the Clarion, 16 March 1895, where archaic-sounding language is used in the last verse (of twelve):

I sing a song of native worth
With a hey down derry derry!
Of the good old earth and sun-browned mirth,
While England yet was 'merrie'.

52 Robert Blatchford, Britain for the British, third edition, Clarion Press, 1910, first published 1902, p.1. It is likely that this book would have been called 'England for the English' had not J. Fyrie-Mayo written 'I cannot help noting the word "England", as if Scotland, Ireland, and Wales were not in existence!' Clarion, 9 Nov 1895; Leonard Hall replied for the Clarion, 7 Dec 1895, 'I find it necessary to explain' he wrote, 'for the mollification of some Clarionettes, that by the phrase, "England for the English," we, of course, mean, "The British Isles for the British."'

remained a live issue. Glasier, years later, asked, 'who owns the land?'⁵³ 'Let us inquire for ourselves,' he decided:

Let us go into the country, where we can see the land. Here is a great agricultural region in Shropshire. We shall ask this old labourer at his cottage door, who has worked all his life on the neighbouring fields, if he owns the land upon which he has spent his fifty or sixty years of daily toil. He tells us no. He owns nothing he says ...

In this instance the land belonged to the Duke of Sutherland, as did much of the Highlands of Scotland as well as mining districts and towns. 'Casey' (Walter Hampson) asked the same question in different words, Who are the Bloodsuckers?⁵⁴ He included 'a list of the principal ones'. The individual ownership of land meant that 'England is now private property.'⁵⁵ The conclusion drawn from this was that 'A robber band has seized the land,/ And we are exiles here.'⁵⁶ Hyndman argued that 'between the fifteenth and beginning of the seventeenth century the whole face of England had been changed.... The fine old yeoman class fell more and more into decrepitude.... By the middle of the eighteenth century there was scarcely a yeoman of the old type left.' There had been, he said, a 'long series of robberies from the people'.⁵⁷ William C. Anderson showed that between 1727 and 1845 there were 1,385 enclosure acts. 'One-third of the entire land of the country was enclosed - stolen from the labouring people.'⁵⁸ Morris and Bax described the result of enclosures:

The tenants were rack-rented, the yeomen were expropriated, the hinds were driven off the land into the towns, there to work as "free" labourers. England thus contributed her share to commerce, paying for it with nothing more important than the loss of the rough joviality, plenty, and independence of spirit, which once attracted the admiration of foreigners more crushed by the feudal system and by its abuses than were the English.⁵⁹

Anti-landlordism and land agitation were not the monopoly of socialists. Henry George's Progress and Poverty had sold 100,000 copies, and had a much wider influence than on those who would become socialists through reading it. Radical politics had a long history of land agitation before George's speaking tours in the

53 Pamphlet of that title in ILP National Socialist campaign, n.d. 1908?.

54 ILP, n.d. c1907.

55 What Socialism Is, Fabian Society Tract No. 13, 1890, p.1.

56 Edward Carpenter, 'The People to their Land,' in Carpenter (ed.), Chants of Labour, pp.50-51.

57 Hyndman, England for All, pp.16, 17. See also Hyndman, Historical Basis of Socialism, chapter 2.

58 William C. Anderson, Socialism, the Dukes and the Land, ILP, Manchester and London, n.d. 1907? p.11. One result of those enclosures, hedgerows, are now seen as essential to 'England'.

59 Morris and Bax, Socialism: Its Growth and Outcome, p.92.

early 1880s. Indeed, it was this previous agitation that resulted in the remarkable receptiveness to George's land tax ideas.⁶⁰ The Land Nationalisation Society and English Land Restoration League were radical Liberal organisations, and Joseph Chamberlain made the slogan 'three acres and a cow' central to his 'unauthorised programme' of the mid-1880s. Down to the First World War the Liberals dominated the land reform movement, and often socialists were simply echoing their language.⁶¹

The Clarion, on 14 September 1895, published a verse entitled 'To the Farmers of England by One of Them':

The Norman came to England to take our land away;
We fought him, but he conquered. Alack, the woeful day!
He took our land and gave it to his soldiers fierce and bold,
And ever since they've held it, and still they mean to hold.
...
And the sons of English freemen have toiled for lord and earl,
And still the Norman claims the rent, and the Saxon is the churl.
'Tis time the memory perished of the Conqueror's wicked laws,
'Tis time the English nation did rule the English cause,
'Tis time the Norman's heavy hand were lifted from our head,
And England for the English were the English law instead.

Blatchford also drew attention to the Norman Conquest: 'They claim the land as theirs,' he wrote of the landowners, 'because eight hundred years ago their fathers took it from the English people.'⁶² Tom Mann, in his Memoirs, quoted John Morrison Davidson quoting the Digger manifesto at a lecture between 1898 and 1901: 'That all the liberties of the people were lost by the coming of William the Conqueror, and that ever since the people of God had lived under tyranny and oppression worse than under the Egyptians.'⁶³

But in effect the Norman Yoke theory had been negated by Thorold Rogers, Hyndman and others. For if the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries had been a golden age because the people were organically attached to the soil, the land must have been stolen since. William Morris argued that the Conquest had turned England aside from developing 'her' own laws, language and literature as 'a great homogeneous Teutonic people infused usefully with a mixture of Celtic blood,' but that while for a time England was 'a piece of France ... in time she did grow into another England again.'⁶⁴ The state of historical research, relating to the Middle

60 John Saville, 'Henry George and the British Labour Movement,' Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History, No.5, 1962, pp.18-19.

61 See Roy Douglas, Land, People and Politics A History of the Land Question in the United Kingdom, 1878-1952, Allison and Busby, 1976.

62 Blatchford, Britain for the British, pp.53-54.

63 Tom Mann, Memoirs, MacGibbon and Kee, 1967, first published 1923, pp.121-123.

64 Morris, 'Feudal England,' Commonweal, 1887, in Works XXIII, p.41.

Ages, made the Norman Yoke theory less attractive. However the similarities between the Norman Yoke theory and the Golden Age of the fourteenth century form a unity of feeling.

Merrie England in the Future

When picturing the future socialist society, the early socialists looked back to the England of the past, which they saw as preferable to foreign countries, and certainly superior to industrialised England. Combined with ideas of fellowship and the new life, the English past went towards producing a vision of socialist England, most particularly in William Morris's News from Nowhere.

Morris had come to socialism via the radical internationalism of the Eastern Question Association, of which he had been treasurer during the Eastern crisis of 1877-78. He had been disgusted by jingoism, but also by 'the cowardice of the so-called Liberal Party'.⁶⁵ He had been interested by the relationship between the people and art in pre-industrial societies, and saw that relationship torn asunder by capitalism (rather than industrialism). He saw England as un-spectacular, but 'abundant of meaning for such as choose to seek it: it is neither prison nor palace, but a decent home.'⁶⁶ He loved 'the common-place English landscape' made beautiful by 'the little grey church,' and the 'little grey house' that 'makes an English village a thing apart'.⁶⁷ The choice before England was the restoration of the close relationship of the people to their art, or capitalist industrialism - 'So which shall we have,' he asked, 'art or dirt?'⁶⁸

E.P. Thompson has described Morris as 'a pioneer of constructive thought as to the organization of social life within Communist society',⁶⁹ and while this was not solely achieved in News from Nowhere, this book was the single most influential of his works. It describes a dream of a future English communist society. The world into which William Guest awakes is almost the England of the fourteenth century described by Morris elsewhere in his works.

The highway ran through wide sunny meadows and garden-like tillage.... There were houses about, some on the road, some amongst the fields with pleasant lanes leading down to them, and each surrounded by a teeming garden. They were all pretty in design, and as solid as might be, but countryfied in appearance, like yeomen's dwellings; some of red brick ... but more of timber and plaster, which were by necessity of their construction so like medieval houses of the same materials that

65 E.P. Thompson, William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary, second edition, Merlin, 1977, p.220. Much of the section on Morris relies on this book.

66 Morris, Works XXII, p.17.

67 Morris, Works XXII, p.41.

68 Morris, Works XXII, p.172.

69 Thompson, William Morris, p.682.

I fairly felt as if I were alive in the fourteenth century; a sensation helped out by the costume of the people that we met or passed ...⁷⁰

Guest's guide through London 'read Shakespeare and had not forgotten the Middle Ages,' but the nineteenth century, 'of which such big words have been said, counted for nothing.'⁷¹ According to Morris, what had once existed could come again. The condition of England is described to Guest thus:

This is how we stand. England was once a country of clearings amongst the woods and wastes, with a few towns interspersed, which were fortresses for the feudal army, markets for the folk, gathering places for the craftsmen. It then became a country of huge and foul workshops and fouler gambling-dens, surrounded by an ill-kept, poverty stricken farm, pillaged by the masters of the workshops. It is now a garden, where nothing is wasted and nothing is spoilt, with the necessary dwellings, sheds, and workshops scattered up and down the country, all trim and neat and pretty.⁷²

The best has been taken up from the past, and thrust into the future. Thus Hyndman and Morris wrote of 'restitution', reclaiming for the people what was theirs, rather than of 'confiscation'.⁷³ But Morris quite clearly removed the feudal social relationship; Nowhere was not a hierarchical society. There was a further reason for using the past as a model for News from Nowhere. 'Although it has often been attempted,' Morris and Bax wrote, 'it is impossible to build up a scheme for the society of the future, for no man can really think himself out of his own days.'⁷⁴ Morris insisted that News from Nowhere was not a blueprint. 'The only safe way of reading a Utopia is to consider it as the expression of the temperament of its author,' he had written,⁷⁵ and the full title of the book reveals News from Nowhere as A Utopian Romance. He therefore included in it what he found desirable from both past and present. Thus he does not reject machines. In Nowhere, 'all work which would be irksome to do by hand is done by immensely improved machinery; and in all work which it is a pleasure to do by hand machinery is done without.'⁷⁶ In 'Work in a Factory As It Might Be II' he argues that 'machines of the most ingenious and best approved kinds will be used when necessary, but will be used to save human labour.'⁷⁷ Morris saw *capitalist* industrialism as the source of the ruin of England. Thus he spoke of 'commercialism.' Factories, he argued, could be made pleasant,

70 William Morris, News from Nowhere, Longmans Green, 1908, first published 1890, p.24.

71 News from Nowhere, p.54.

72 News from Nowhere, p.80.

73 A Summary of the Principles of Socialism, p.60.

74 Socialism: Its Growth and Outcome, p.17.

75 Commonweal, 30 June 1888 in May Morris, William Morris II, p.502.

76 Morris, News from Nowhere, p.108.

77 May Morris, William Morris II, pp.133-136.

with gardens, libraries and schools around them. There was no reason that they should be huddled together in ugly, sprawling cities. The end of competition would lead to the greater use of new inventions for the benefit of all.⁷⁸

More influential than Morris was Robert Blatchford's Merrie England. Whereas News from Nowhere was a novel, Merrie England was non-fiction and propagandist. This makes its sales of 750,000 within a year all the more impressive. 'And it has not been to a new economic theory, merely, that these converts have been introduced' John Trevor wrote, 'it has been to a new life. Their eyes shine with the gladness of a new birth.'⁷⁹ The selling of Merrie England was just as important as reading it, as it gave socialists an ideal exposition of their beliefs to offer to potential converts.⁸⁰

The title was essential, for it identified socialism as English, happy and as a restoration of the past. It was addressed to John Smith, an Oldham cotton spinner, Clarion's typical modern Englishman. John Smith was unlikely to be a Liberal, and far more likely to have been brought up in a tradition of the Lancashire Tory 'politics of beer and Britannia'.⁸¹ Blatchford's politics were staunchly independent of the Liberals and far away from the puritanism of much of the ILP.⁸² While presenting arguments for Blatchford's socialism, it indicates what should be the result of that socialism.

First of all, [Blatchford wrote] I would restrict our mines, furnaces, chemical works and factories to the number actually needed for the supply of our own people. Then I would stop the smoke nuisance by developing water power and electricity. Then I would set men to work to grow wheat and fruit and to rear cattle and poultry for our own use.⁸³

The factory system would not be allowed to continue for

the thing is evil. It is evil in its origin, in its progress, in its motives, and in its effects. No nation can be sound whose motive power is greed. No nation can be secure unless it is independent, no nation can be independent unless it is based upon agriculture.⁸⁴

Blatchford's socialism aimed at securing England as a nation. A rural economy, he

78 'A Factory As It Might Be I', pp.133-136, 'Work in a Factory As It Might Be III,' pp.136-140, in May Morris, William Morris II.

79 Thompson, Robert Blatchford, p.101.

80 See Robert Blatchford, My Eighty Years, Cassell, 1931, pp.196-197 and Thompson, Robert Blatchford, pp.99-100, for the remarkable selling techniques adopted.

81 Patrick Joyce, Work, Society and Politics, Methuen, 1982, pp.292-310.

82 Pelling, Origins of the Labour Party, p.121.

83 Robert Blatchford, Merrie England, Clarion, 1894, p.18.

84 Merrie England, p.35

believed, would achieve this security by taking advantage of England's insularity. Luckily, England had two things in her favour: 'The country is fertile and fruitful ... [and] the people are intelligent, industrious, strong, and famous for their perseverance, their inventiveness and resource.'⁸⁵ 'We English have done many impossible things,' he declared.⁸⁶ Blatchford's socialism was, above all other things, national. He appealed to the people to come over to the socialists

If you as a Briton are proud of your country and your race, if you as a man have any pride in your manhood, or as a worker have any pride in your class ... help in the just and wise policy of winning Britain for the British, manhood for *all* men, womanhood for *all* women, and love to-day and hope to-morrow for the Children, whom Christ loved, but who by many Christians have unhappily been forgotten.⁸⁷

Based on Morris and Blatchford, British socialists saw the future socialist society as essentially rural, with a restored sense of fellowship. Walter Crane gave visual expression to such ideas. Born in 1845, the son of a painter, he was apprenticed to the Chartist wood-engraver, W.J. Linton. He joined the SDF around 1884 after reading William Morris's Art and Socialism, which, he wrote, 'had a great effect upon my mind'.⁸⁸ He was emphatically non-sectarian, undertaking art-work for any left of centre political organisation that commissioned him, making his influence widely felt across the left. His cartoons adorn the socialist journals and 'shaped the imagery of socialism on trade union banners for thirty years from the early 1890s until well into the 1920s'.⁸⁹ He too had an idealised view of the past:

England was once not only 'merrie' but beautiful - her people well and picturesquely clad: her towns rich with lovely architecture - life a perpetual pageant ... the colour and fantastic invention in costume and heraldry; the constant show and processions, such as those organised by the craft guilds, full of quaint allegory and symbolic meaning ... gay with flaunting banners ...⁹⁰

Such a view led to an idealised interpretation of socialism, such as his winged and draped female figures and strong, heroic labourers, surrounded by the bounty of nature. 'Take care of the beauty of nature, preserve your ancient buildings, give leisure and hope to all men,' he told an audience in 1888, 'and the gold pieces of art and thought and beauty will take care of themselves.' The foundation of 'all good art lay in the handicrafts and in the art of the people.'⁹¹ Crane saw the restoration of art

85 Merrie England, p.11.

86 Merrie England, p.193.

87 Blatchford, Britain for the British, pp.172-173.

88 Walter Crane, An Artist's Reminiscences, Methuen, 1907, pp.254-255.

89 John Gorman, Images of Labour, Scorpion, n.p., 1985, p.18.

90 Gorman, Images of Labour, p.163.

91 'The Prospects of Art under Socialism,' (A paper read to Fabian Society), The Socialist, 21 July 1888.

and the people as leading to a revival of national art, as he noted on trips abroad:

Such a museum of national art - the art of the people - is really understood and popular, and it seems to me that our Continental neighbours ... in realising the importance and interest of such museums ... are in advance of us, as we have not a museum of national domestic art.⁹²

He was deeply touched by the symbolism of St George, and after illustrating an edition of Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, he painted 'England's Emblem', which he described as:

our patron saint in full armour upon a white horse with red trappings, charging the dragon, behind which was a gloomy landscape with factory chimneys dark against lurid bars of sunset, and to the left a stretch of seashore, and a neglected plough in the middle distance - perhaps not an obscure allegory.⁹³

This was a popular allegory for the struggle between socialism and capitalism, presenting the latter as an enemy of England. Edward Carpenter wrote a play for children called 'St George and the Dragon', and the cover of Glasier's *On Strikes* shows St George and the dragon.⁹⁴ Clearly many socialists saw themselves as patriots, out to bring 'England to her own rescue'.⁹⁵

Evidence for the popularity of such ideas, as well as coming from the singing of radical patriotic and English songs, comes from the number of fund-raising events taking the theme of 'Merrie England'. Bradford Labour Church held 'The Champion Show of the Year - Ye Olde English Fayre' in March 1895; there was a 'Merrie England Fayre' in Liverpool City Hall opening on May Day 1895; Bolton ILP had a 'Grand Merry England Maye Fayre' with 'old English costumes and maypole dancing' (and, rather bizarrely an 'Unique Japanese Stall!'); Birmingham Labour Church held a 'Merrie England Fayre' on 31 October and 1 and 2 November 1895; Gorton ILP announced a 'Merrie England Maye Fayre' with 'A "MERRIE ENGLAND" VILLAGE', changing the name of the event to 'Maye in December' as it was to be held on 4 December 1895. The Gorton event offered

Ann Hathaway's Cottage and Cottagers. The Bee Hive and Busy Bees. The Maypole and Villagers. The Greenwood Tree and Robin Hood and his Merry Men and Maidens. The Little Brown Jug and Potters. Poets' Corner and Bards. Titania's

92 Crane, *An Artist's Reminiscences*, p.494.

93 Crane, *An Artist's Reminiscences*, pp.431-432.

94 Edward Carpenter, *St George and the Dragon: A Play in Three Acts for Children and Young Folk*, Labour Press, Manchester, 1895; J. Bruce Glasier, *On Strikes*, Labour Literature Society and Labour Press Society, Manchester and Glasgow, n.d. 1897? One would have supposed that *killing* the dragon would have suggested revolution.

95 A Crane cartoon and poem in Andrew Reid (ed.), *Vox Clamantium: The Gospel of the People*, A.D. Innes, 1894, pp.162-165.

Bower and Faerie Belles. Ye Olde Village Inn and Matrons and Maidens. I Zingari and the Gipsy Queen.

The whole event would be, the advertisement in Clarion promised, 'pretty, tasteful and jolly.'⁹⁶ At the 'Great International Bazaar' in Blackburn in March 1908, children of the Socialist Sunday School offered 'Old English Morris Dancing', and there were stalls of 'Old England' - 'an Elizabethan half-timbered house' and 'Modern England' - 'a modern English cottage with dormer windows, creepers and overhanging eaves'. Blatchford was there to open the bazaar.⁹⁷

There was more than simply a fund-raising role for such events. The SDF in 1900 chose the theme of the French Revolution for their bazaar to raise £1,000, as much more in sympathy with their politics.⁹⁸ A Clarion reporter shows the significance of such events in his comment that 'here, in Halifax, at the ILP bazaar, we have lived and moved in "Merrie England", and it is well with us.'⁹⁹ Socialists could even buy their clothes from 'The Merrie England Supply Stores' in Rochester Street, Bradford. If they could not get to Bradford, they could join the 'Merrie England Clothing Club'. And they were urged to do so, for 'if reformers do not help each other, who is to help them?' the shop and club's advertisements asked.¹⁰⁰

* * * * *

Clearly then, many socialists saw themselves, like their radical forbears, as patriots. Hardie wrote that a socialist was one who sought 'to resuscitate a phase of British life which produced great and good results in the past'.¹⁰¹ Socialists based many of their ideas on historical precedent, as had earlier radical movements. Such

96 All these events are advertised in the Clarion in 1895. Other advertisements appear in Labour Leader, for example, Halifax Independent Labour Union, 6 Oct 1895; Hyde, 26 Nov 1909. The National ILP Bazaar of Easter 1897 also took the Merrie England theme and aimed to raise £1000, Clarion, 6 March 1897.

97 Handbook of the Great International Bazaar, Exchange Hall, Blackburn, March 1908, other stalls included one representing the Colonies - 'a log hut in pine woods' and India - 'an Indian palace'. For the Socialist Sunday Schools, see F. Reid, 'Socialist Sunday Schools in Britain, 1892-1939,' International Review of Social History, vol. X, 1966, pp.18-47. The children were taught 'The Socialist Ten Commandments'. Number 9 stated 'Do not think that those who love their own country must hate and despise other nations, or wish for war, which is a remnant of barbarism.'

98 Gorman, Images of Labour, p.174.

99 Clarion, 13 Oct 1894 in Waters, British Socialists and Popular Culture, p.90. Waters says one attraction of such events was that they provided improving entertainment, p.89.

100 See advertisement on inside front cover of C.A. Glyde, Liberal and Tory Hypocrisy during the 19th Century, published privately, Bradford, n.d. 1900?.

101 Hardie, From Serfdom to Socialism, p.18.

ideas involved a belief in the ideal of how things should happen in England. Thus, when events did not live up to this ideal, Socialists would counterpoise the belief to the reality. Justice declared that the raid on the International Club in London, a meeting place for European socialists and anarchists in exile, showed the 'Continental tactics of the police' and suggested that the money of foreign governments was involved in initiating the raid.¹⁰² In the same vein was the satirical poem, 'Not in England' in the Labour Leader of 23 December 1899:

Let us spin a Christmas rhyme;
Here's to England!
"Rule Britannia" every time;
I'm for England!
Wise and foolish, old and young,
Come and join and give it trug [*sic*].
If he lives who suffers wrong,
It's not in England.

... If the master be denied,
It's not in England;
If war be glorified,
It's not in England;
If yon Christmas chime denotes,
The song of peace serenely floats,
Over Christians cutting throats,
It's not in England.

More general were articles in Clarion headed 'Britain's Glory' or 'Happy England', reporting deaths through starvation, or imprisonments for theft undertaken by the poverty-stricken.¹⁰³ One Clarion reader objected to such methods, calling them 'a disgrace to Socialism and to you. The lowest of men have always desired their country's glory. You, by raking up accidental cases of distress to old soldiers, and belittling British pluck, are doing your best to turn the people against their own country.' A.M. Thompson replied that his intention was to do the opposite, to make people have more respect for their country by changing it so that such things could not happen.¹⁰⁴ The best example of this oppositional Englishness is found in the Clarion of 16 September 1893 following the fatal shooting of a miner at Featherstone, Yorkshire. The poem by 'Bogggs' [*sic*] on the front page implores:

Oh, England! veil thy haughty face,
And bow thy crest with shame;
For Englishmen, with red disgrace,
Have stained thy glorious name.

102 Justice, 16 May 1885.

103 For example see Clarion, 12 March 1892, 9 Dec 1893, 6 Jan 1894.

104 'By the Way', Clarion, 1 Feb 1896.

How tarnished is thy glory, and
How humbled is thy pride,
Since England's arms, on English land,
With English blood are dyed...

'Mont Blong' (Montagu Blatchford) continued on this theme, that 'British subjects have been done to death by British soldiers, and English liberty has received a blow from which it will not recover.' An editorial in the same issue pointed out that 'this is the first time since Peterloo that free Englishmen have been shot for refusing to move off the public roads.' The Clarion writers saw this less an event in a class war than as a 'shameful outrage upon the liberties of the people'.¹⁰⁵ They expressed not the class nature of the situation but their outrage that this could occur in England. Such oppositional Englishness, as will be shown, emerges again and again in the language of the British left.

105 Clarion, 23 Sept 1893.

Chapter 3

Constructing English Socialism 1881-1906

If socialists were keen to assert that they represented the true defence of the English struggle for liberty, they were especially keen to show that socialism itself was 'English', for they perceived that they were seen as 'foreign'. May Morris, looking back from 1936, was of the opinion that 'to the man in the street, in those days, Socialists and revolutionaries were an importation from the continent - a legacy of the days of 1848 and the French Commune of 1871 jumbled together - all the more execrated as such.'¹ The first issue of Justice believed that 'Democratic Socialism was everywhere spoken of as merely another name for secret assassination or dynamite outrage, and the greatest efforts were made to show plainly that no matter how rife such ideas were abroad, Socialism could never take root in England.' With the publication of Justice, 'however, it is quite clear that Socialists are gaining strength more rapidly than any existing party,' the editors declared optimistically.² The Commonweal of 9 September 1886 reported that Van de Hout, a Dutch tailor from Hackney Socialist League had exposed the cry of foreigners, 'which socialists are so often met with,' as 'capitalistic'.³ Morris was inclined to treat the whole idea as a joke in his play, The Tables Turned. The judge claims that, from their (Cockney) accents, the 'ruffianly revolutionists ... are foreigners of a low type'. The prosecutor refers to 'a set of wicked persons in the country ... that class of non-respectable foreigners'.⁴

The SDF was especially involved in trying to refute ideas that socialism was foreign to England, particularly in its early years. Hyndman wrote that:

It is well known that the idea of socialism is no foreign importation into England. Tyler, Cade, Ball, Kett, More, Bellers, Spence, Owen, read to me like sound English names: not a foreigner in the whole batch. They all held opinions which our capitalist-landlord House of Commons would denounce as direct plagiarisms from 'continental revolutionists'. We islanders have been revolutionists however, and will be again.⁵

1 May Morris, William Morris Artist, Writer, Socialist, Volume II, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1936, p.73.

2 Justice, 19 Jan 1884.

3 'William Morris's Socialist Diary', Florence Boos (ed.), History Workshop, no. 13, 1982, p.46n.

4 May Morris, William Morris II, pp.537, 539.

5 H.M. Hyndman, The Historical Basis of Socialism in England, Kegan Paul Trench, 1883, p.4n. The title itself shows the attempt at national legitimization.

Harry Quelch, reporting from a conference of continental socialists in France, wrote that:

In England ... as one of the French delegates remarked, the people seem to have forgotten the popular traditions; they have forgotten that the first popular movement of modern times, of a Socialistic character, was the English Chartist movement. To them ... Socialism is characterized as a foreign importation, a noxious weed, which can only grow as the result of Continental Despotism, and will never take root in the soil of free England.⁶

The following week an editorial in Justice was entitled 'Socialism in '34.' It named Cobbett, Cartwright, O'Connor, Thomas Frost, Bronterre O'Brien and Ernest Jones as forebears of modern Socialism, and concluded that 'English Socialism then is no recent importation, it is native to the soil, and the socialists of 1884 are but continuing the work which has been handed on from previous generations.'⁷

Hyndman even stressed that 'in England ... there was more practical Socialism than in any other nation,' and that he was following the Chartists by emphasising national history, for 'unlike continental revolutionists, they founded their claims upon the history of their country, and clamoured for the restoration of rights which their fathers had been deprived of.'⁸ Hyndman's patriotic temperament had been combined with socialism through a 'foreigner'. He had failed in England for All to acknowledge Marx as the source of the economic arguments presented, and Marx claimed that Hyndman had done this because 'the English don't like to be taught by foreigners.'⁹ Yet Hyndman admired Ferdinand Lassalle, who was, he wrote,

unlike Blanqui or Marx, essentially a national Socialist, who wished above all things, to raise the Fatherland to a high level of greatness and glory. This national turn, though a great weakness economically [because of the global economy] ... was nevertheless a help rather than a hindrance to an agitator who wished to rouse his countrymen from a long and apparently hopeless apathy.¹⁰

Hyndman clearly saw himself as an English Lassalle.

Hyndman was inclined to use violent language, hence one pamphlet of his was entitled The Coming Revolution in England, and included the chilling line: 'Revolution! What have the workers to fear from revolution!'¹¹ But he used such

6 Justice, 12 April 1884.

7 Justice, 19 April 1884. Written by R.P.B. Frost. For more English name-dropping see also H.M. Hyndman, Socialism and Slavery, third edition, William Reeves, n.d., 1892? p.4, and William Morris, 'A Dream of John Ball' in Morris, Stories in Prose, Stories in Verse, Shorter Poems, Lectures and Essays, edited by G.D.H. Cole, Nonesuch, 1934, pp.198-266.

8 Hyndman, Historical Basis, pp.409, 208.

9 Marx and Engels, Correspondence 1846-1895 A Selection, Martin Lawrence, 1934, p.397.

10 Hyndman, Historical Basis, p.417.

11 Hyndman, The Coming Revolution in England, William Reeves, n.d. 1883, p.30.

language in much the same way as the ILP did in a leaflet entitled 'The Revolt of Labour' of about 1902, in which it was felt necessary to explain:

The word 'revolt' will bring to some readers' eyes visions of barricades in the streets, burning houses, and falling churches, and he will fancy he hears the roll of musketry and the groans of the wounded. He need not be unduly alarmed however. The Independent Labour Party does not preach physical force or mob law.¹²

Hyndman believed that 'ideas vary with race and climate,'¹³ and explained that 'We, perhaps, alone among the peoples can carry out with peace, order, and contentment those changes which continental revolutionists have sought through anarchy and bloodshed.'¹⁴ He explained why this should be so:

The position of Great Britain and her colonies, as well as the United States, differs from that of European countries inasmuch as the Anglo-Saxon communities have long had nearly all that the people of the Continent of Europe are still striving for. Rights of public meeting, freedom of the press, and freedom of speech, the fullest possible personal liberty - these have long been secured, and men of our race have so far been able to work out political problems without that dangerous excitement which has attended the endeavour to solve them elsewhere.¹⁵

Hence, while fundamental changes were needed,

such changes ... may be gradual, but they must be rapid. In England, fortunately, we have had a long political history to lead up to our natural development, the growth of a great nation such as ours has its effect on all portions of the people. Patriotism is part of our heritage; self-restraint necessarily comes from the exercise of political power. Even the poorest are ready to accept the assurance of real reform, rather than listen to those who would urge them in desperation to violent change.¹⁶

Hyndman combined the Marxist idea of 'the combination of modern proletarians [*sic*]' with a belief in national characteristics, for he saw such a combination as aided by the 'constructive instincts' of 'the Celto-Teutonic peoples'.¹⁷ Such reliance on beliefs about national character, rather than the materialist conception of history which lay at the base of Marxism, left Hyndman vulnerable to attack by more moderate socialists, who used ideas of national identity to defend their own approaches to socialism, and who could rely on the full force of the dominant ideology about the nature of the English.¹⁸

12 ILP, 'Platform' leaflet no. 69.

13 H.M. Hyndman, 'Dawn of a Revolutionary Epoch,' Nineteenth Century, Jan 1881, p.2.

14 H.M. Hyndman, England for All: The Textbook of Democracy, Harvester, Brighton, 1973, p.194.

15 Hyndman, 'Dawn of a Revolutionary Epoch,' pp.11-12.

16 Hyndman, England for All, p.5.

17 Hyndman, Historical Basis, p.194n.

18 See Philip Dodd, 'Englishness and the National Culture,' and Robert Colls, 'Englishness and the Political Culture,' in Robert Colls and Philip Dodd (eds.), Englishness: Politics and Culture 1880-1920, Croom Helm, 1986.

The Fabian Society and the Normal Course of English Life

In 1896 the Fabian Society told the Second International congress meeting in London that:

The Fabian Society is perfectly constitutional in its attitude; and its methods are those usual in political life in England.

The Fabian Society accepts the conditions imposed on it by human nature and by the national character and political circumstances of the English people. It sympathizes with the ordinary citizen's desire for gradual, peaceful changes as against revolution, conflict with the army and police, and martyrdom.... The Fabian Society therefore begs those Socialists who are looking forward to a sensational historical crisis, to join some other Society.¹⁹

This was the finished product of Fabian policy, for ten years earlier a Fabian tract had declared that 'English Socialism is not yet Anarchist or Collectivist, not yet definite enough in point of policy to be classified.'²⁰ Two years earlier still the Society had declared that 'we would rather face a civil war than such another century of suffering as the present one has been.'²¹ Until the late 1880s the Society was unable to formulate a unified policy. Its leading members were attracted to different elements of the socialist movement; Bernard Shaw favoured the revolutionaries, Hubert Bland rejected both the SDF to the left and the Radicals to the right, Annie Besant was disposed towards ethical socialism but thought the SDF more concerned with practical politics, Charlotte Wilson was an anarchist, Sydney Olivier was drawn to the Simple Lifers and Sidney Webb and Graham Wallas sought co-operation with London Radicals.²² It was only after the unemployed riots of 1886 and Bloody Sunday, when police and soldiers violently prevented a demonstration from taking place in Trafalgar Square that the Society totally embraced constitutionalism.

In Fabian Essays Sidney Webb wrote that

all students of society who are abreast of their time, Socialists as well as Individualists, realize that important organic changes can only be (1) democratic ...; (2) gradual, ... causing no dislocation, however rapid may be the rate of progress; (3) not regarded as immoral by the mass of the people ...; and (4) *in this country* at any rate, constitutional and peaceful.²³

Shaw, in the same volume, declared

19 Report on Fabian Policy, Fabian Tract no. 70, 1896, p.4.

20 What Socialism Is, Tract no. 4, 1886, in A.M. McBriar, Fabian Socialism and English Politics 1884-1918, Cambridge UP, 1962, p.10.

21 Manifesto, Fabian Tract no. 2, 1884, in McBriar, Fabian Socialism, p.4.

22 Norman and Jeanne MacKenzie, The First Fabians, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977, pp.77-78.

23 Fabian Essays in Socialism, Fabian Society, 1920, first published 1889, pp.34-35. Emphasis added.

This, then, is the humdrum programme of the practical Social Democrat to-day. There is not one new item in it. All are applications of principles already admitted, and extensions of practices already in full activity. All have on them the stamp of the vestry which is so congenial to the British mind. None of them compel the use of the words Socialism or Revolution: at no point do they involve guillotining, declaring the Rights of Man, swearing on the altar of the country, or anything else that is supposed to be essentially un-English.²⁴

However much wit Shaw intended the last part of the statement to show off, subsequent actions by himself and other Fabians tend to suggest that there was seriousness behind the wit. Shaw had written the tract What Socialism Is in 1886, declaring for anarchism and socialism. He tried to eradicate its memory; it was never reprinted. Indeed in 1890 a tract of the same name appeared without reference to anarchism. He had remarked of his Hampstead debates with Philip Wicksteed on Marx that they 'ended in my education and conversion by my opponent,' and added self-importantly 'and in the disappearance of the Marxian theory of value from the articles of faith of British Socialism'.²⁵ When it came to politics, Shaw submerged his Irishness behind his Britishness. Webb called the Essays 'a complete exposition of modern English Socialism in its latest and maturest phase,'²⁶ and Edward Pease wrote that

Fabian Essays presented the case for Socialism in plain language which everybody could understand. It based Socialism, not on the speculations of a German philosopher, but on the obvious evolution of society as we see it around us. It accepted economic science as taught by accredited British professors; it built up the edifice of Socialism on the foundations of our existing political and social institutions....

[The Fabian Society's] first achievement ... was to break the spell of Marxism in Britain.... The Fabian Society freed English Socialism from this intellectual bondage....

If German Socialism would not suit, English Socialism had to be formulated to take its place. This has been the life-work of the Fabian Society.²⁷

The Society was therefore deliberately aiming to create what it saw as an authentic English socialism. One reason for this was connected to the class of person the Society aimed to recruit. Beatrice Webb's much quoted question and answer, 'to bring about the maximum amount of public control in public administration do we want to organize the unthinking persons into Socialist societies, or to make the thinking persons socialistic? We believe in the latter process,'²⁸ provides the key to

24 Fabian Essays, p.200.

25 Michael Holroyd, Bernard Shaw Volume I 1856-1898 The Search for Love, Chatto and Windus, 1988, pp.182, 178.

26 Sidney Webb, Socialism in England Gower, Aldershot, 1987, first published 1890, p.38.

27 Edward R. Pease, The History of the Fabian Society, Fifield, 1916, pp.90-91, 236, 240.

28 Henry Pelling, The Origins of the Labour Party 1880-1900, second edition, Oxford UP, Oxford, 1966, p.182.

Fabians' claims of Englishness. Shaw wrote of the Fabians, 'whose Socialism could be adopted either as a whole or by instalments by any ordinary respectable citizen without committing himself to any revolutionary association or detaching himself in any way from the normal course of English life.'²⁹

The Clarion and the Walsall Anarchists

While the SDF had suggested that socialism had a tradition in England the Fabians argued that not all socialism was English. The use of violence was rejected as un-English. In 1892 six anarchists in Walsall were arrested for making a bomb intended for the assassination of the tsar of Russia.³⁰ Writers on the Clarion were concerned that the reputation of socialism would be damaged. They therefore condemned the methods of the anarchists as un-English, even stooping to suggest that only foreigners could be involved:

For they are foreigners, it seems,
And Anarchists - may be,
Who merely hatch their violent schemes
For export, don't you see?

And as we open wide our doors
To all who lift the latch,
Those Anarchists, from foreign shores,
Come here their plots to hatch

England, at this time of day has only loathing and scorn for schemes of violent revolution [an editorial continued]. At no time were the English people enamoured of revolt, but now when all reform can be won steadily by education and constitutional means, the very mention of force excites anger and contempt. The people have the power, if they have the will, to bring about by peaceful means the emancipation of the people.... Even should the need for such means exist, the weapon selected by an English Revolutionary would not be dynamite. Were they to fight, the English would come out into the open and fight like Englishmen. But they have no need to fight.³¹

The Clarion sided firmly with the British state against the anarchists, four of whom were British, as it turned out. They had been tricked by an *agent provocateur* into making a bomb for use against a most despotic ruler. With this stance the Clarion was prepared to use both xenophobia and anti-immigrant sentiments.³² The Clarion did attack the press coverage of the case, but only for suggesting that the bomb-

29 Preface to William Morris, Communism, Fabian Tract no. 113, 1903, p.3. Paradoxically, for the master of paradox, Morris's pamphlet was an attack on the 'make-shift alleviations' of reformism, which would come to be 'looked upon as ends in themselves', p.11.

30 John Quail, The Slow Burning Fuse: The Lost History of the British Anarchists, Paladin, 1978, chapter 6.

31 Clarion, 16 Jan 1892.

32 See Haia Shpayer-Makov, 'Anarchism in British Public Opinion 1880-1914,' Victorian Studies, vol. 31, no. 4, p.496, for the perceptions of a link between immigration and anarchism.

makers were socialists.³³ The following week an editorial declared that 'modern English Socialism is not a violent revolutionary movement ... *English Socialism* to-day has nothing to say to barricades and dynamite.'³⁴ The anarchists received sentences of up to ten years in jail. Among the prominent socialists, only Edward Carpenter, who gave evidence in their defence, supported them.³⁵

The ILP and 'British Socialism'

More generally this rejection of violence as un-English included revolution altogether. At the inaugural conference of the Independent Labour Party in Bradford in 1893 Ben Tillett's outburst was received with shock by the assembled delegates. 'In spite of all that had been said about the Socialists,' he said,

he thought English Trades Unionism was the best sort of Socialism and Labourism. He wished to capture the trade unionists of this country ... who did not shout for blood red revolution, and, when it came to revolution, sneaked under the nearest bed.... With his experience of unions, he was glad to say that if there were fifty such red revolutionary parties as there were in Germany, he would sooner have the solid, progressive, matter of fact, fighting Trades Unionism of England than all the hare-brained chatterers and magpies of Continental revolutionists.³⁶

Even the Clarion was moved to condemn Tillett. Blatchford called it 'the most regrettable incident' and reminded readers that 'the Labour cause is the Labour cause in Germany as in England. Justice is not a geographical idea.'³⁷ Tillett in an essay written in 1895 repeated the root of his sentiments: the workers 'have been, it is true, temporarily led away by other and chimerical movements, but the sturdy common sense of their leaders, and the law-abiding instincts of the masses, have always brought them back to the true and constitutional line of progress.'³⁸ Had he used such language at the ILP conference it is unlikely that anyone would have objected, for it was the venom of his language that was found shocking.

The leadership of the ILP shared Tillett's aim, that is to attract the trade unions to the idea of labour representation. In the discussion of the name of the new party at the conference a delegate from Glasgow suggested the name 'Socialist Labour Party' because 'in Scotland the Labour Party had come to the conclusion that it was best to call a spade a spade'. A delegate from Colne Valley pointed out that in Germany,

33 Clarion, 9 April 1892.

34 Clarion, 16 April 1892.

35 The radical Reynolds' Newspaper also supported the anarchists, Shpayer-Makov, 'Anarchism in Public Opinion,' p.502.

36 Report of the First General Conference of the Independent Labour Party, 1893, p.3.

37 Clarion, 21 Jan 1893.

38 Ben Tillett, 'The Need for Labour Representation,' in Frank W. Galton (ed.), Workers on their Industries, Swann Sonnenschein, 1895, pp.219-220.

France and America such parties called themselves Social Democratic. Supporters of the Labour alternative pointed out that an electoral party must appeal to more than just socialists.³⁹ David Howell concludes that 'pragmatism and, perhaps, patriotism combined to give near unanimous backing to the Labour option'.⁴⁰ Leeds socialist Tom Maguire's later statement that 'suddenly a name was coined that hit off the genius of the English people' supports this conclusion.⁴¹

The 1890s saw the conjunction of two elements that led to an increasing attack on non-parliamentarian socialism as foreign. First, the defeat of the wave of new unionism led many unionists to look towards political activity rather than industrial struggle. Hence in Bradford the defeat of the Manningham Mills strike led to the establishment of the Bradford Labour Union, which was to be central to the ILP. In Leeds, where new unionism had been more successful, it was not until 1906 that an ILP councillor was elected.⁴² The employers' counter-offensive of the 1890s pushed trade union leaders into greater consideration of the idea of independent labour representation, but did nothing to increase their trust in the socialists. Second, many socialists began to doubt the steady progress of socialism. Between 1893 and 1900 not a single ILP candidate was elected at a parliamentary election, and Keir Hardie lost his West Ham South seat in the 1895 general election, which saw what Howell has called 'the death of easy optimism'.⁴³ The deaths in the middle years of the 1890s of prominent socialists such as William Morris, Eleanor Marx, 'The Bounder' (E.F. Fay of the Clarion), Carolyn Martyn and Tom Maguire increased the despondency. Henry Pelling has noted that 'by 1897 ... it was clear that the "Socialist boom" was over ... the total affiliation fees [of the ILP], which forms the most reliable indication of its strength, dropped from a peak of £450 in 1897-8 to little more than £300 in 1900.'⁴⁴

Such conditions led the rank-and-file of the ILP to press for unity with the SDF, to the chagrin of the increasingly centralised ILP leadership, which was becoming dominated by Hardie, MacDonald, Glasier and Snowden. While the leadership were looking towards a greater alliance with the trade unions, the membership seemed to be spoiling this by seeking links with the Marxists. Through using the language of

39 ILP, Conference Report, 1893, p.3.

40 David Howell, British Workers and the Independent Labour Party 1888-1906, Manchester UP, Manchester, 1983, p.293.

41 Dewsbury Reporter, 13 Oct 1894 in E.P. Thompson, 'A Homage to Tom Maguire,' in Asa Briggs and John Saville (eds.), Essays in Labour History, Macmillan, 1960, pp.301-302.

42 Pelling, Origins of the Labour Party, pp.94-95; Thompson, 'Homage to Tom Maguire,' pp.302-303.

43 Howell, British Workers and the ILP, p.309.

44 Pelling, Origins of the Labour Party, p.179.

Englishness (or, as will be shown, Britishness) the leadership could show the trade unions how moderate was British socialism and, at the same time, oppose fusion or federation with the SDF.

One major reason why language seeking to establish the national character of Socialism in Britain became the language of 'Britishness' rather than of 'Englishness' was that the ILP leadership was dominated by Scots. This domination was not a reflection of the strength of the Scottish membership of the ILP. At the inaugural conference, of the 120 delegates, only eleven represented Scottish organisations, compared with twenty-two from Bradford or fourteen from London.⁴⁵ Nevertheless Hardie, MacDonald and Glasier, of the 'big four', were of Scottish birth.

John Bruce Glasier, born in 1859 in Ayr but brought up in Glasgow, seems to have embraced different ideas, one after the other, with fervour.⁴⁶ His father had been an atheist who crossed the words 'God', 'Christ' and 'Heaven' out of John's school books. Aged fourteen, John swore to be a minister. He then discovered Byron and Shelley and turned to poetry, sending the privately-printed 'Empire against Liberty' (1879 or 1880) to Gladstone, Disraeli, Garibaldi, William Morris and others. The poems showed that combination of love of liberty and country that signified radical patriotism. The choice of recipients suggest that radical patriotic language was suitable for all positions of politics. For example,

Then rise ye freemen for your fellowmen -
For Liberty! and strike the Despot down!
Break into fragments his blood-tarnished crown;
Let not a relic of his power remain!

How grand! How glorious! Liberty appears
When struggling in the foremost front of war!
When patriots around their heart's blood pour
To gain their rights, and dry their country's tears!⁴⁷

The Eastern Crisis showed how such sentiments could cross the line into support for 'Jingoism', for Glasier joined the Volunteers and his diary exclaims: 'Why should not every British youth be prepared to defend the glorious privileges of his country! ... Shall it ever be written in history that the Britons lost their rights and liberties so dearly purchased by the blood of their fathers, through negligence and weakness?' And it was to English symbols that Glasier was attracted, even suggesting that he was English, for his diary reveals that he revered the great popular hero, Nelson.

45 Howell, British Workers and the ILP, p.291.

46 Much of the following relies on Laurence Thompson, The Enthusiasts: A Biography of John and Katharine Bruce Glasier, Gollancz, 1971.

47 Thompson, Enthusiasts, pp.20-25.

'Dear Nelson,' he wrote '- how truly English he was. I envy Hardy kissing him - how different from your stoical Wellingtons and Napoleons, he possessed a true and almost childlike enthusiasm - Nelson and Wolfe are two heroes that ought to be dearest to the hearts of all englishmen [*sic*].'⁴⁸ After a brief interlude in the Irish Land League and SDF, Glasier followed his hero, Morris, into the Socialist League. He was attracted by the ethical aspects of socialism, and while being seen as a 'barricades man' in his early years, tactics were of little interest to him.⁴⁹ In 1893 he married Katharine Conway and was attracted by the ethical bent of the ILP (the Socialist League had been taken over by anarchists). After gaining prominence in the banned socialist meetings at Boggart Hole, Clough, near Manchester, he was elected to the ILP NAC in 1897. In 1898, the Glasiers moved to Manchester. As Hardie explained, he had changed. 'In those days when I first met him,' Hardie recalled in 1903, 'he was an idealist pouring out fiery contempt on politicians and all their works. He is still an idealist, but has come to recognise that the way by which the ideal may be reached is more prosaic than his fresh enthusiasm at one time imagined.'⁵⁰ In 1893 Glasier had written that 'Socialism gives us our highest ideal of the conduct of life, and calls from us the highest service of thought, emotion, and deed - that is our aim and prophecy, and to it is due the utmost and gladdest devotion of all our gifts and powers.' Referring to the Russian Nihilists, Paris Communards, and Chicago Anarchists, he wrote of Socialism as 'a Religion for which many of the bravest and most gifted souls of this age have offered their lives'.⁵¹ Yet by June 1903 he was writing to Carpenter about the ILP that

It has been the means of restoring the English tradition into our Socialist agitation - a tradition which was lost by the usurpation of the Marxist and Communal. For myself, I feel as one set free now that I am able to speak and work for Socialism without feeling that I belong to a different cast of beings from that of the ordinary Liberal or Tory. I feel much joy, too, now that I realize that Socialism is not a thing that a few refugees and philosophers brought into the world from twenty to forty years ago, but that it is a power that began with the beginning of the world and permeates infinitude.⁵²

Glasier embraced reformism, and believed that this was the real native tradition of British socialism of which the ILP was the perfect example, and, like the Fabians,

48 Thompson, Enthusiasts, pp.30, 31. Wolfe defeated the Jacobites at Culloden, though Glasier was more likely to have been referring to his role in the capture of Quebec in 1759.

49 Stanley Pierson, Marxism and the Origins of British Socialism: The Struggle for a New Consciousness, Cornell UP, Ithaca and London, 1973, p.142, 144.

50 Thompson, Enthusiasts, p.113.

51 Katharine St John Conway and J. Bruce Glasier, The Religion of Socialism: Two Aspects, Labour Literature Society and Labour Press, Glasgow and Manchester, n.d., pp.10, 16.

52 Stanley Pierson, British Socialism: The Journey from Fantasy to Politics, Harvard UP, Cambridge, Mass., 1979, p.60.

saw it as a normal part of English life.⁵³ But this tradition may also have suited the European socialist movement, he believed. After the 1904 meeting of the Second International in Amsterdam he wrote to Hardie that

I am more than ever convinced that the continental movement has fallen into a species of mere radicalism, and that it is marching by watchwords rather than by either faith or right. The half of these bourgeois leaders abroad strike me as utterly unregenerate from our Morris, Ruskin, Burns point of view.... The cause of Socialism not only in our own country but in the world will receive a new character of freedom if only we set our I.L.P. or British (should I not say Scottish?) conception above all German formulas.⁵⁴

James Keir Hardie, born in Lanarkshire in 1856, came to socialism via trades unionism. Having been a miner, he became secretary of the Ayrshire Miners Union in 1886. Hardie drew the fury of Henry Broadhurst at the 1887 Trades Union Congress when he attacked Broadhurst for being involved in a company using sweated labour. Broadhurst rebuked him thus: 'These intolerable, un-English attacks by Mr Hardie were a new feature of the Congress. He was surprised at a man coming here for the first time and showing such bad taste (hear, hear).'⁵⁵ This shows the confusion surrounding the idea of un-Englishness, for Hardie was of course a Scot, and the Congress was being held in Wales.

Hardie was proud of his Scottishness, drawing his socialism from the Covenanters, Carlyle and particularly Burns. He wrote, 'I owe more to Burns than any other man alive or dead.'⁵⁶ He remarked how he had read Border tales, and 'these took hold of my imagination and created within me a love of the tales and traditions of Scotland.'⁵⁷ During the Mid-Lanark by-election in 1888 that made him a national figure, he appealed for and received the support of the Scottish Home Rule Association (of which Ramsay MacDonald was London secretary). He displayed Scotland's distinctness from England at the 1889 congress of the International, jumping up every time a delegate said 'English'. Hardie corrected them, 'And Scots!'⁵⁸

Hardie was central to the formation of the ILP, and was a fairly typical specimen of the blend of labourism and socialism that was at the root of its politics. But he

53 See Labour Leader, 2 April 1904.

54 Philip P. Poirier, The Advent of the Labour Party, George Allen and Unwin, 1958, pp.227-228. As early as 6 February 1892 the Clarion suggested (with tongue in cheek) exporting Fabian lecturers 'to impart a little reason and usefulness to the proceedings'.

55 Kenneth O. Morgan, Keir Hardie: Radical and Socialist, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1975, p.19.

56 Labour Leader, 22 June 1909 in Caroline Benn, Keir Hardie, Hutchinson, 1992, p.11.

57 'The Labour Party and the Books That Helped to Make It,' Review of Reviews, June 1906, p.570.

58 Benn, Keir Hardie, p.70.

revealed too the problem of nationality in a multi-national state. He shared the mainstream view of the past, of a medieval golden age, which also presented an ideal for the future. Under socialism, Hardie assured audiences:

the ugliness and squalor which now meets you at every turn in some of the most beautiful valleys in the world would disappear, the rivers would run pure and clear as they did of yore ... and in the winter the log would glow on the fire the while that the youths and maidens made glad at heart with mirth and song, and there would be beauty and joy everywhere.⁵⁹

This view was based more on a reading of English, rather than British or Scottish, history. It was a pre-union golden age, a merrie England. Thus in July 1914, in an article called 'If I were a dictator', he declared, 'I would have England a "merrie England."⁶⁰ Likewise before the main body of From Serfdom to Socialism he quoted a poem that urged, 'Come ye that listen, rise and gird your swords,/ Win back the fields of England for the poor.'⁶¹

This in no way stopped Hardie from appealing to the electors in Merthyr Tydfil through their shared Celticness. In 1898 he had decided that 'all celts ... are socialist by instinct'.⁶² He made a point of visiting an eisteddfod and learnt to sing the Welsh national anthem in Welsh.⁶³ He declared 'Socialism the hope of Wales,'⁶⁴ and hoped one day to see 'the red dragon ... emblazoned on the red flag of Socialism, the international emblem of the working class movement of the world.'⁶⁵

Hardie's socialism, despite its ethical quality, was also 'practical'. 'With the speculative side of Socialism the average man with us has but small concern;' he wrote, 'it is its common sense which appeals to him.'⁶⁶ He used Scottishness to defend this view of an essentially British socialism. In 1889 he had written to Engels that 'Social Democracy as an organised force in Scotland is nowhere.... We are a solid people, very practical, and not given to chasing bubbles.'⁶⁷ But usually he spoke more generally of the British in his rejection of the politics of the SDF. At the 1889 International congress, Commonweal reported him going out of his way 'to

59 Geoffrey Foote, The Labour Party's Political Thought: A History, second edition, Croom Helm, 1986, p.48. See also Keir Hardie, From Serfdom to Socialism, edited by Robert E. Dowse, Harvester, Brighton, 1974, first published 1907, chapter 5.

60 Young Man, July 1914, in Emrys Hughes (ed.), Keir Hardie's Speeches and Writings, Forward, Glasgow, n.d. p.162.

61 Hardie, From Serfdom to Socialism, p.xii.

62 Benn, Keir Hardie, p.142. His pamphlets on Scottish employers, for example Lord Overtoun, should perhaps have suggested otherwise.

63 Benn, Keir Hardie, pp.164-165.

64 Pamphlet of that name, published in English and Welsh, ILP, n.d. 1908?

65 Benn, Keir Hardie, p.257.

66 Hardie, From Serfdom to Socialism, p.34.

67 Iain McLean, Keir Hardie, Allen Lane, 1975, p.41.

declare that no person in England believed in other than peaceful methods to achieve the amelioration of conditions.⁶⁸ He attacked the SDF and the idea of class war as foreign. 'The propaganda by class hatred is not one which can ever take root in this country,' he wrote, ' - which I regard as a most fortunate circumstance.'⁶⁹ But surprisingly he was attracted by the idea of Marxism; despite his 'Indictment of the Class War'⁷⁰ he also wrote articles claiming Marx for the ILP.⁷¹ Again Morgan puts this in context, 'Hardie claimed to be a follower of Marx. But it was clearly a very British, very respectable Marx that he presented - one quite unrecognizable to Engels.... Hardie was creating a Marx ... in his own image.'⁷²

James Ramsay MacDonald, born in 1866 at Lossiemouth, completes the trio of Scots dominant in the ILP. In the mid-1880s he left Scotland, first for Bristol and then London. He joined the Fabian Society and became secretary of the London Committee of the Scottish Home Rule Association. In 1906 he told the Review of Reviews that Scott's Waverley novels and Scottish history had 'opened out the great world of national life for me'.⁷³ He maintained support for home rule for Scotland, calling ideas of Home Rule all round 'a frank recognition of the national interests of England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales [which] would ... tend to preserve that diversity in life which strengthens an imperial stock.'⁷⁴ His support for devolution was therefore based on the belief in its benefits for Britain as a whole. Having been rejected as Liberal candidate for Southampton (he had also served as secretary to a Liberal MP) he stood as an Independent Labour candidate in 1895 and joined the ILP. His socialism suggested no links with labourism, which he saw as sectional. 'Our movement,' he declared, 'is neither a party nor a class movement, but a national one.'⁷⁵ This was a sentiment he held throughout his career. It stemmed from his whole conception of socialism, which was as a movement of the whole of society.

But society not being a mechanical relationship merely, but being united by habits, laws, customs, and interdependence of interests, the Socialist change must be gradual and must proceed in stages, just as the evolution of an organism does. Society will resist a too violent readjustment. Kings can be removed and a republic

68 10 Aug 1889, in Morgan, Keir Hardie, p.40.

69 Labour Leader, 17 Aug 1901.

70 Labour Leader, 2 and 9 Sept 1904.

71 See Labour Leader: 'A Lame Excuse and a Libel,' 26 Nov 1909; 'Karl Marx, the Man and his Message,' 26 Aug 1910.

72 Morgan, Keir Hardie, p.203.

73 Review of Reviews, June 1906, p.577.

74 J. Ramsay MacDonald, Socialism and Government Volume II, 2 volumes, ILP, 1909, p.120.

75 Southampton Times, 11 Aug 1894, in David Marquand, Ramsay MacDonald, Jonathan Cape, 1977, pp.36-37.

established by revolutions, but in establishing Socialism we change organic relationships, not superficial forms of government.⁷⁶

MacDonald therefore saw any change being determined by national circumstances; the party of change had to base itself on these. Hence the failure of the SDF, whose 'foreign outlook, phrases and criticisms ... never quite fitted themselves into British conditions'.

With the formation of the Independent Labour Party, Socialism in Great Britain entered upon a new phase. Continental shibboleths and phrases were discarded. The propaganda became British. The history which it used, the modes of thought which it adopted, the political methods which it pursued, the allies which it sought for, were all determined by British conditions.⁷⁷

With Hardie, MacDonald used such beliefs to appeal for the formation of a progressive alliance of radicals and socialists, and the same sentiments had the advantage that they also appealed to Liberal trade union leaders. In an article published in January 1899 Hardie and MacDonald stressed the bankruptcy of Liberalism and declared socialism as the inspiration of progressive forces in the twentieth century. 'The Independent Labour Party is in the true line of apostolic succession,' they wrote and went on to stress the 'British' character of ILP socialism:

The spirit of British Socialism, which regards its mission to be the transformation of the whole social fabric ... has the historical sense predominant, and that is only saying that, like all great movements nurtured under a democratic form of government, it trusts to no sudden changes, it needs no beginnings afresh, it works under the conditions it has found, its constructive methods are chiefly adaptation and rearrangement, its ideals are the growths of the past, its work is to proportion and complete the present.⁷⁸

After the formation of the Labour Representation Committee in 1900, in which the ILPers had been able to reject the SDF's motion of a party committed to the principle of class struggle, MacDonald turned once again to the Liberals, securing a secret electoral agreement which enabled the election of twenty-nine Labour MPs in 1906.⁷⁹ MacDonald was now prepared to use arguments about the nativeness of his conception of socialism against the left wing of his own party, those who were dissatisfied with the labour alliance and the parliamentary party:

76 J. Ramsay MacDonald, Socialism, New York, 1970, first published 1907, p.117.

77 MacDonald, Socialism, pp.49-50.

78 J. Keir Hardie and J.R. Macdonald, 'The Independent Labour Party's Programme,' Nineteenth Century, Jan 1899, p.25.

79 Frank Bealey and Henry Pelling, Labour and Politics 1900-1906: A History of the Labour Representation Committee, Macmillan, 1958, chapters 2 and 6.

The clamour for a Socialist party is a remnant of the revolutionary period, or a copying of methods proper to countries where parliamentary government is but a name. What is wanted here is a party which accepts the Socialist point of view and approaches the industrial problems of Society with Socialist assumptions in mind.... Socialism is to come through a socialistic political party and not through a Socialist one.⁸⁰

MacDonald, with Hardie and Glasier, were all proud of their Scottish origins, and favoured some measure of home rule for Scotland, but in the last instance they were British national politicians seeking all-British measures. James D. Young has written of 'the English domination of British socialism,'⁸¹ and undoubtedly this phrase is largely accurate. However, the cause of this was less 'English cultural imperialism' than the acceptance by the mainstream of the labour movement, whether English, Scottish or Welsh, that the advance to socialism would come by means of parliament. The political strategy involved was therefore British. Within this strategy, Hardie could appeal for the votes of his constituents by their Welshness, but when elected he took his seat in Westminster. Hardie stood for Mid-Lanark in 1888, but none of these early leaders were elected for Scottish seats. Hardie in 1892 was elected for West Ham South, in 1900 and subsequently for Merthyr Tydfil; MacDonald was elected in 1906 for Leicester; and Glasier stood for a Birmingham constituency in 1906. This mattered little to them, for they saw themselves as British politicians. All three were involved in the attempt to present the ILP, and later the Labour Party, as the British form of socialism. The British labour movement has overwhelmingly accepted the territorial integrity of the British nation, and hence has largely used ideas about Britishness, which have been dominated by Englishness. Ireland is a different matter altogether, but Shaw, operating in the context of British socialism, himself used ideas of Britishness.

Socialists in the late nineteenth century involved themselves in attempting to prove the national legitimacy of socialism. While the early attempts had been non-sectarian, because socialism had remained largely undefined in Britain, later attempts by the ILP and Fabian Society were aimed at the left-wing socialists. A major part of this construction of a national form of socialism had, paradoxically, been undertaken by socialists from national minorities within the multi-national British Isles.

80 MacDonald, Socialism and Government II, p.12.

81 James D. Young, 'A Very English Socialism and the Celtic Fringe 1880-1991,' History Workshop, No. 35, 1993. pp.136-152.

Britain for the British or The World for the Workers?

How then did the legitimization of socialism through the appeal to national character and conditions sit alongside British socialists' professed internationalism? Internationalism has always been an extremely important element of socialism. Marx and Engels' call, 'Working Men of All Countries, Unite!' had been essential to their socialism: since capitalism was global, the struggle for socialism too had to be global. In Britain there had been a long tradition of radical internationalism which the socialists aimed to continue. Symbolic of this was May Day, held annually from 1890. British socialists often saw May Day not only as a celebration of the international solidarity of labour, but also as a traditional English holiday. One example of this is Walter Crane's cartoon for May Day 1894 called 'The Workers' May-Pole'.⁸² A second example comes from the SDF. Its secretary, H.W. Lee, was the author of a pamphlet explaining the significance of May Day. He wrote of 'May Day in Olden Times' and asked

Can we look back on those festal doings without regret - nay sorrow - that they are no longer with us? Does it not prove that our ancestors, whatever drawbacks they may have suffered in some respects, were far freer from cramping, monotonous drudgeries than the mass of mankind are to-day?⁸³

He drew attention to the May Pole and sports of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, which the SDF would be reviving at the 1900 May Day celebrations at Crystal Palace.⁸⁴ British labour therefore often fitted their internationalism around an affection for English traditions. They did not believe that workers had no country, but supported the idea of pluralism when it came to nationality. Hence the Clarion for its May Day Number for 1895 commissioned Crane's 'A Garland for May Day', which included the slogan 'The Cause of Labour is the Hope of the World,' but also 'Merrie England' and 'England Shall Feed Her Own People.' The usual celebration of May Day by the ILP included a May Fayre.⁸⁵

Philip Snowden perhaps best shows the way in which internationalism was emotionally adhered to by British socialists:

I see our modern towns swept away [he wrote], and in their place beautiful cities whose buildings reflect the pride of the community in their common life.... I see everywhere a change come over the face of the landscape; every meadow smiles

82 Walter Crane, Cartoons for the Cause: Designs and Verses for the Socialist and Labour Movement, 1886-1896, Journeyman/Marx Memorial Library, 1976, cartoon IX. First published 1896 as a souvenir for the International Congress held in London in that year.

83 H.W. Lee, The First of May: The International Labour Day, SDF, 1900, p.4.

84 Lee, The First of May, pp.5, 6.

85 See pp.43-44 above.

with plenty, every valley blossoms as the rose, every hill is green with the glory of Lebanon.... And my vision extends, though more dimly, beyond the confines of my own dear land, and I see this spirit of brotherhood among the nations has broken down international barriers, and international hatred is no more ...⁸⁶

For most British socialists, internationalism was something desirable, but it was also something distant. With few exceptions, socialists operated in a largely national context.⁸⁷ This could lead to socialists seeing no further than the English Channel. This was most blatant in Robert Blatchford's socialism. Laurence Thompson points out Blatchford's parochialism, and comments, 'Blatchford regarded nothing in Merrie England as rhetorical; but the least rhetorical thing in it was the title, which meant exactly what it said.'⁸⁸ A.M. Thompson, fellow journalist on the Clarion and friend to Blatchford for more than half a century, wrote that Blatchford had introduced him to 'Socialism, or rather to the system of altruism, rooted in love of this country and its people, which he expounded in "Merrie England."⁸⁹

In both Merrie England and Britain for the British Blatchford argued for an autarkic economy. Both books contained chapters asking 'Can Britain Feed Herself?'⁹⁰ The answer was a resounding yes. This question was seen as a selling point for Merrie England. 'War with America means Famine in a Month,' declared an advertisement. 'If England could feed herself she would not be at the mercy of any foreign power. How it can be done is clearly shown in Merrie England.'⁹¹ Blatchford wished to isolate Britain, seeing island status as a positive advantage. 'But don't you see, Mr. Smith, that if we lose our power to feed ourselves we *destroy the advantages of our insular position?*' he asked. It was to this end that he urged the improvement of agriculture, for he saw it as the answer to the 'arithmetical problem' that Merrie England set out to answer: 'Given a Country and a People, find how the People may make the best of the Country and of Themselves.' Hence, 'the people should make the best of their own country before attempting to trade with

86 Philip Snowden, The Christ That Is To Be, ILP, n.d. 1905?, p.12.

87 Work on an international level was undertaken by trade unionists, such as Tom Mann who aimed to create an international dockers' union. See his Memoirs, chapter 9 'International Labour Organization, 1896-1898.' Unions such as the Amalgamated Society of Engineers had branches around the world, for example in Canada, South Africa and Australia. But these were less an expression of internationalism than of skilled workers' emigration to the white dominions. See Logie Barrow, 'White Solidarity in 1914,' in Raphael Samuel (ed.), Patriotism Volume I History and Politics, Routledge, 1989, pp.275-287.

88 Laurence Thompson, Robert Blatchford: Portrait of an Englishman, Victor Gollancz, 1951, p.110.

89 Preface to Robert Blatchford, My Eighty Years, p.xii.

90 Robert Blatchford, Merrie England, Clarion, 1894, chapter 4; Britain for the British, third edition, Clarion, 1910, chapter 12. Merrie England actually asked 'Can England Feed Herself?'

91 For example, Clarion, 4 Jan 1896.

other people's.'⁹² 'If we cannot keep our foreign trade without giving up our love and our manhood and our honour, it is time the foreign trade went to the devil and took the British employers with it.'⁹³ Blatchford became contemptuous of internationalism:

To the I.L.P. came women and men from the ranks of the Tories, Liberals, Radicals, Nonconformists and Marxians. Many of these brought with them sectarian or party shibboleths which they had not outgrown. There were Free-Traders, Home Rulers, Local Optionists, Republicans, Roman Catholics, Salvationists, Church and Chapel-goers and believers in the cosmopolitan brotherhood of the workers. What was rather loosely called: 'The Solidarity of Nations.'

Internationalism was therefore a 'shibboleth' to the Clarion men: 'We were out for Socialism and nothing but Socialism and we were Britons first and Socialists next.'⁹⁴ Blatchford's slogan 'Britain for the British' was not therefore solely a statement of oppositional Englishness, but an exclusion of others, those who were, unfortunately, not British. A Clarion editorial declared

Frankly, we confess to belonging to that class of parochial-minded people who recognise the ring of true patriotism in the phrase 'England for the English', and the ring of true honesty in the less frequently heard sentiment of 'Africa for the Africans'.⁹⁵

Blatchford was not alone in his desire to see England feed itself. Arthur Hickmott of the SDF called the dependence on foreign food 'a great source of national weakness' necessitating an expansion of the navy.⁹⁶ Leonard Hall of the ILP was emphatic on the subject of foreign trade:

What blasphemy from the point of view of patriotism! What sheer lunacy from the point of view of business!! ... It is to the opening up and development of our *home market* right here in our own country, amongst our own people, that we must turn, and turn quickly if we are to avert that national shipwreck that seems to threaten.... Nature has provided in our island all that is necessary to produce as great a civilisation and as fine a race of men and women as this world can hope for, if only we had conditions of equity, freedom and sound economy.⁹⁷

In 1909 a 'National Labour and Socialist' conference on food supply was held in London, though by this time talk of food supply in time of war was linked to the

92 Blatchford, Merrie England, pp. 34, 11, 12. Original emphasis.

93 Blatchford, Britain for the British, p.133.

94 Blatchford, My Eighty Years, p.199.

95 Clarion, 4 April 1893.

96 Arthur Hickmott, Socialism and Agriculture, Twentieth Century Press, 1897, p.3.

97 Leonard Hall, Land, Labour and Liberty, or The ABC of Reform, Clarion pamphlet no. 30, 1899, pp.10-11.

'German Menace', so that only seven ILP branches sent delegates.⁹⁸ But even Hardie, 'more than any other Labour leader of his day ... associated with the idea of international fraternalism,'⁹⁹ declared during a by-election in Bradford in 1896 that 'in every county of merry England there was a real demand for British goods without going beyond the seas.' Morgan points out that 'Hardie's conclusions were usually nationalist, even mercantilist. Outlets for British products could be found in abundance at home; the competition for markets overseas was unnecessary.'¹⁰⁰ Howell has argued that the ILP as a whole thought in terms of a national economy, though still as part of a global system:

The ILP viewed the British economy as potentially adequate but handicapped by the parasitic activities of landlords and monopolists, blunted by inadequate educational facilities, and rendered anaemic by a maldistribution of wealth.... Presumably the object of the ILP proposals [nationalisation, technical education, progressive taxation, taxes on land values] was to make British industry into a more effective participant in the international capitalist contest. The British nation and economic 'success' remained key units of reference, merging somewhat uneasily with dreams of a socialist commonwealth.¹⁰¹

Islington branch of the ILP had recommended a boycott of the Clarion, believing it to be printed on foreign paper, Blatchford assured readers that despite English paper being more expensive and of lower quality than foreign paper 'we feel that while so many of our own countrymen are out of work we ought to use British paper.'¹⁰² Indeed from July 1895 the following was found on every issue: 'Printed by Trade Union Labour (the Eight Hour Day) and on English-made Paper.' At the height of the South African War, J.G. Graves felt confidence enough in the patriotism of Labour Leader readers to advertise his watches with the slogans, 'BRITISH!' and 'Sound English Watch', with a picture of the British lion in front of an oversize watch.¹⁰³ Whereas many politicians and commentators saw 'splendid isolation' in terms of foreign policy, and indeed many were becoming concerned about Britain's isolation, many on the left saw this isolation in terms of a domestic policy, and would continue to see isolation as splendid.¹⁰⁴

98 National Labour and Socialist Conference on Our Food Supply Official Report, Twentieth Century Press, 1909. Forty-two SDF branches sent delegates.

99 Morgan, Keir Hardie, p.178.

100 Morgan, Keir Hardie, pp.91, 179.

101 Howell, British Workers and the ILP, p.348.

102 Clarion, 19 Jan 1895.

103 Labour Leader, 3 Aug 1901.

104 See Christopher Howard, Splendid Isolation, Macmillan, 1967, for the complex attitudes towards isolation.

The Left and Immigration

One potential area of conflict between the exclusive idea of 'Britain for the British' and the radical-patriotic idea of liberty came in the area of alien immigration. Underlying the whole subject was the dominance of ideas about race. Raphael Samuel has noted that

One of the more ambiguous legacies of radical-democratic history is that of English nationalism - the notion that the English people have been singled out for a special place in history, that the English language is superior to others, and that the liberty of the individual is more secure than it is abroad.¹⁰⁵

Even opponents of restrictions being placed on immigration discussed the issue in terms of the possible effects on the stock of the English as a 'race.' Glasier was prepared to admit ignorance; he wrote, 'We do not know to what extent, and under what conditions, the intermixing, or even the co-operation of different races is good or bad for the physical health or social progress of nations.'¹⁰⁶ But the framing of the question in these terms suggested that it was a problem of nation and race, and allowed those who sought to prevent immigration on the grounds of its effect on 'the race' a headstart in the arguments. Some of these were also on the left. Ben Tillett, as early as 1889, was attacking government policy which allowed

all the dregs and scum of the Continent to make foetid, putrid and congested our already overcrowded slums ... while ... men who would have been very good citizens, good patriots, bearing and discharging every social responsibility with credit to themselves and honour and glory to their country ... are starved and driven to desperation.¹⁰⁷

In 1893 the Clarion saw the problem in terms of immigration combined with emigration. An editorial spoke of mismanagement of the nation which meant that, 'the best of our bone and brain must seek a living in other lands, leaving their places to be filled with the mental and physical dregs of foreign peoples who do not mind serving as slaves and living as beasts.'¹⁰⁸ J.A. Dixon used the same line of argument. 'Thus is the Old World depleting itself of its best and most adventurous blood ... while we accept with open arms all the broken-spirited physical wrecks which

105 'British Marxist Historians, 1880-1980: Part I,' New Left Review, no. 120, March-April 1980, p.41.

106 'Socialism and the Anti-Alien Sentiment,' Labour Leader, 30 April 1904.

107 Jonathan Schneer, Ben Tillett, University of Illinois Press, Urban, Chicago and London, 1982, p.60.

108 Clarion, 4 April 1893.

Northern Europe cares to dump down,' he wrote.¹⁰⁹ The health of the 'nation' was seen as the concern of the left, and in part that health was seen to be determined by the origin of its inhabitants rather than by its social organisation. At the 1903 ILP conference, which rejected a resolution proposing restrictions on immigration, Glasier spoke of the decline of the nation, showing concerns not usually associated with the left:

Our foreign trade is flagging; our internal freedom and external defence are less secure; our military glory is dimmer; our national character, our literature, our science, our inventions are in less repute; our young and virile population is quitting the country as if it were a sinking ship, and we are getting in pauper aliens and rich predatory aliens instead.¹¹⁰

The resolution that had been defeated (submitted by Hyde branch) presented the second argument for restriction: 'That in the opinion of this conference it is necessary seeing the effect Alien Immigration has upon the Housing Problem and Labour Market generally, some measure should be at once passed into law restricting same.'¹¹¹ This was more normal ground for socialists and trade unionists, but it could also be used to disguise racist arguments. Tillett, leader of the dockers, amongst whom foreign labour was negligible, argued that indirectly this competition affected his members. Conditions in the docks were made worse, he argued, by the influx of English men 'ousted from their own trades by the foreigners'.¹¹²

Generally, the left were opposed to any restriction of immigration. Support for restriction came mainly from those trades that perceived themselves to be under threat of cheap competition.¹¹³ Trade union representatives giving evidence to the Royal Commission on Alien Immigration 1903 included three from the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives, four from Costermongers' unions and five from clothing unions.¹¹⁴ Nevertheless, the evidence Robert Smillie, President of the

109 'On Emigrants,' Labour Leader, 9 June 1894, in John A. Garrard, The English and Immigration 1880-1910, Oxford UP, 1971, p.19.

110 J. Bruce Glasier, Labour: Its Politics and Ideals, ILP, n.d. 1903, p.5. Glasier's position seems to have been to oppose restrictions on immigration because the numbers involved did not warrant it, not because of internationalism. See his article, 'The Anti-Alien Sentiment,' Labour Leader, 30 April 1904.

111 ILP, Nominations for Officers and N.A.C. and Resolutions for the Agenda, 1903 Conference, p.13.

112 Garrard, The English and Immigration, pp.163-164. Garrard shows that in effect the competition was minimal, even in the bootmaking trade, only 1 in 25 workers in 1891 was Jewish, and the proportion was declining, yet it was the Bootmakers' union which was at the forefront of resolutions to the TUC aimed at restricting immigration, pp.164-165.

113 Colin Holmes, Anti-Semitism in British Society 1876-1939, Edward Arnold, 1979, p.21.

114 Royal Commission on Alien Immigration 1903 Minutes of Evidence, Cd. 1742.

Scottish Miners' Federation, gave to the Commission showed that opposition on the grounds that aliens displaced labour became linked with stereotypical views of the newcomers. Smillie said of the 1,320 Lithuanian miners working in Lanarkshire that 'we do not object to him as a foreigner at all'. Yet he could also add that 'they can live a good deal cheaper than our own people', and that 'they are a serious danger [because of language problems] indeed to themselves and our own people.' He was forced to admit that 'we have not at the present time had any single accident caused to a British workman by a foreigner.' The chairman asked him if he wanted aliens excluded until all British miners were working. Smillie hedged around the question, but the chairman pushed the point. In the end Smillie replied that 'we have reason to complain that our people should go idle while the foreigners are underground'.¹¹⁵

There were many attacks on restriction. Andreas Scheu of the Socialist League attacked the argument that alien immigration was the cause of low wages. If an aliens bill were passed into law, he wrote:

we may safely assume that poverty in the British Isles will soon be a thing of the past! ... How easy and well-to-do the East End workmen and workwomen would then become, all of a sudden.... For observe, that the British workmen never compete with each other, and therefore reduce their wages.... To Ireland, the poor foreign Jews have, as yet, not penetrated ... and hence the standard of the Irish peasants and wage workers is almost an ideal one.¹¹⁶

Attacks on immigrants as anarchists increased the left's opposition to restrictive legislation, despite the hostility of much of the British left towards anarchism. Arnold White, a leader of the anti-immigration lobby declared that 'the vast majority of these foreign Jews are nihilists and anarchists of the very worst type'. Lord Salisbury had introduced an Aliens Bill in July 1894 aimed at 'those who live in a perpetual conspiracy of assassination'.¹¹⁷ The Aliens Bill of 1904, which the government withdrew, had a clause enabling the exclusion of those of 'notoriously bad character'. Such factors aroused in the left the idea of a tradition of English liberty. At the Annual Conference of the SDF in 1884 it was claimed that 'alone among English organisations, [the Democratic Federation in 1882] came forward to champion one of the most glorious privileges of our country,' the right of asylum.¹¹⁸ The Fabian Society, who saw immigration as 'essentially a question of numbers and proportions' declared itself 'proud of our traditional policy of offering an asylum to the oppressed of all lands'.¹¹⁹ This was a view agreed with by Harry Snell, author of

115 Royal Commission on Alien Immigration, pp.842-845. I owe these points to Harriet Jones.

116 Commonweal, 19 May 1888, in Garrard, The English and Immigration, p.186.

117 Garrard, The English and Immigration, pp.26, 32.

118 Justice, 9 Aug 1884. See also 31 Jan and 21 March 1885.

119 Fabian News, March 1903.

an ILP pamphlet on immigration, which can be taken as the ILP 'line' on the issue. He wrote of 'a tradition that has remained unbroken for hundreds of years; that has given us material prosperity and moral strength.' Snell argued that not only would the 'notoriously bad character' clause have prevented such men as Marx, Engels, Mazzini, Stepniak and Kropotkin from gaining entry to England, but also that Jesus was of notoriously bad character to the authorities of Jerusalem. 'If England has not lost its spirit and forgotten its history,' he continued, 'it will not allow an international police conspiracy to decide who shall be its guests.'¹²⁰ A poem by Harry Lazenby in Labour Leader summed up this sentiment:

England! for myriad ages past
The hospice of the world,
Upon whose white cliffs in the breeze
Freedom's flag unfurled,
Beckoning from every land
The outcast and oppressed;
In a thousand thankful tongues
Has thy name been blessed.¹²¹

All four LRC MPs voted against the 1905 Aliens Bill (which was passed), Hardie asking the Commons about refugees from tsarist Russia, 'Are we to say to these poor creatures that England of all lands under the sun is no resting place for them from the conditions now prevailing in their own country?'¹²² The opposition to restrictive legislation was in large measure framed inside ideas and language of an oppositional Englishness. Garrard concludes that 'with a few notable exceptions, and with a greater or lesser degree of enthusiasm and interest, spokesmen for all the main socialist movements in Britain condemned aliens legislation as reactionary, unbrotherly, inhuman, undemanded and unnecessary.'¹²³ The general feeling of both socialists and trade unionists was summed up by the LRC in 1905: 'Proposals like the Aliens Bill [were] misleading and calculated to divert attention from the real cause of evil, namely the existence of monopoly and the burdens which the non-producing sections place on the industrial classes.'¹²⁴ Garrard's conclusion that 'the left wing finds itself defending the *status quo* against a Conservative party willing and able to pose as the champion of the ordinary British voter,'¹²⁵ gives only half the story, for the defence that the left was inclined to adopt was based less on socialist

120 The Foreigner in England: An Examination of the Problem of Alien Immigration, Tracts for the Times no. 4, ILP, n.d. 1904, pp.3, 6, 7.

121 Labour Leader, 13 Jan 1905.

122 Morgan, Keir Hardie, pp.179-180.

123 Garrard, The English and Immigration, p.182.

124 Poirier, Advent of the Labour Party, p.234.

125 Garrard, The English and Immigration, p.202. He compares the left's attitudes at the turn of the century with that of the 1960s.

internationalism than on traditional ideas of English tolerance and liberty. Hence socialists opposed to immigration restrictions proudly argued that it was they who stood for English traditions, while those holding anti-alien sentiments were being 'un-English.'

* * * * *

There was an ambiguity in the internationalism of the British left. May Day was celebrated as an international festival, but within the context of recognising it also as a celebration of Englishness. The Marxist axiom that 'workers have no country' was rejected in favour of a view of the plurality of national identities. This did not always allow that each nationality was of equal worth. J.R. Clynes recalled his attendance at the International Congress in Zurich in 1893: 'It was difficult to co-ordinate the statements of the stolid British delegates, abhorring armed violence, as much of the mock heroics, with the inflammatory verbal orgies of the representatives of certain of the Latin and Slavonic races,' he wrote.¹²⁶ British delegates to such conferences, while being attracted emotionally to the international solidarity of labour, seemed determined to stress their differences from their continental comrades. To be English, or British, remained special. Much of the left approached strategies for socialism, economics and immigration in terms of their perceptions of national identity. In 1899 the Boer War was to bring such perceptions held by the left into conflict with those of a nation at war.

126 J.R. Clynes, Memoirs 1869-1924, Hutchinson, 1937, p.72.

The Left, England and an Imperial War

At the end of the nineteenth century Britain was the major imperialist power in the world. J.A. Hobson calculated that from 1870 to the end of the century Britain had added 4,754,000 square miles and a population of 88 million to its empire.¹ This growth coincided with the re-emergence of socialist and independent labour politics in Britain. Despite a preoccupation with domestic affairs the left had no option but to respond. The left's initial reaction was condemnation. Robert Blatchford, not well known for his anti-imperialism in later years, wrote in 1892 that while the English people had 'sound heads and hearts' and 'often meant well', nevertheless 'their history is a long roll of blunder and plunder and slaughter and oppression'.² The Labour Leader of 4 February 1899 printed a verse by 'Backyard Stripling', entitled 'Progress and Plunder', sarcastically celebrating the empire thus:

O! we are the British nation, and our heaven-
appointed station
Is to make our influence felt in every clime.
So we send out Christian traders, civilising
chartered raiders,
Who keep spreading rum and gospel all the time ...

Opposition to empire was therefore based on an awareness of the element of British national identity in imperialism. Bernard Shaw had brought this aspect out in 'The Man of Destiny'. 'As the the great champion of freedom and national independence, he annexes half the world, and calls it Colonization,' he commented on the Englishman.³ This chapter examines the responses to the South African War of 1899-1902, as the longest and most costly imperial military engagement between the revival of socialism in the 1880s and the First World War. While most of the left opposed the war, it was from positions of radical patriotism or oppositional Englishness that they did so. Discussion of the war therefore provides a good opportunity for examining the left's ideas about patriotism and national identity, from the minority of socialists who supported the British war effort on the one hand, to the minority who rejected all patriotism in favour of working-class internationalism.

1 J.A. Hobson, Imperialism: A Study, James Nisbet, 1902, p.18.

2 Clarion, 21 May 1892.

3 Bernard Shaw, Plays Pleasant, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1946, p.225.

Blatchford and England

Readers of the Clarion felt shocked and betrayed by Blatchford's announcement on the outbreak of war that he would be supporting the British war effort. Southampton SDF passed a motion of censure on Blatchford, as did Paisley ILP; in Liverpool a black cross was painted across his portrait.⁴ A reader wrote to Blatchford, 'you are a turncoat and a traitor, and should be thrown out of the movement.'⁵ H. Russell Smart, a member of the ILP NAC, 'confess[ed] to having read the utterances of Nunquam with distress and dismay'.⁶

Blatchford's reasoning was as follows: 'Well, my friends, I am a Socialist, and a lover of peace,' he wrote,

but I am also an Englishman. I love my fellow men of all nations ... but I love England more than any other country. Also I am an old soldier, and I love Tommy Atkins.... England's enemies are my enemies. I am an Englishman. That is the point I wish to make clear.

I am not a jingo, I am opposed to war. I do not approve of this present war. But I cannot go with those Socialists whose sympathies are with the enemy. My whole heart is with the British troops.... I am for peace and for international brotherhood. But when England is at war I'm English. I have no politics and no party. I am English.⁷

Blatchford had been the most clear advocate of oppositional Englishness, he had wanted 'Merrie England' and 'England for the English'; he was, he said, a Socialist, an internationalist, an opponent of war, but he could not completely reconcile these positions with being English when England was at war. He denied being a jingo, he had refused to stand for 'Rule Britannia' at a music hall, but now, he told his readers, 'my daughter has orders to play "Rule Britannia" every night while the war lasts,' and 'on this evening of the 16th of October, 1899, I fill a glass with British (Australian) burgundy, and I drink to the health of the Queen and the success of the British Army.'⁸

Clarion readers had reason to be shocked, for, while he had not been consistently anti-imperialist, Blatchford had opposed imperial expansion, often in strong terms. As late as June 1899 he had declared that 'our Empire was built on blood, pillage, and chicanery - mixed with some cant about the word of God. I want none of it.'⁹ A month earlier he had called imperialism 'puerile, barbarous, mercenary and mean ...

4 Clarion, 18 Nov 1899.

5 Clarion, 24 Feb 1900.

6 ILP News, Nov 1899. 'Nunquam' was Blatchford's pen-name.

7 Clarion, 21 Oct 1899.

8 Clarion, 21 Oct 1899. Laurence Thompson, Robert Blatchford: Portrait of an Englishman, Gollancz, 1951, p.156 says the orders were obeyed.

9 Clarion, 3 June 1899.

unchristian ... inhuman ... a casting back to savagery and blind feud' and asked, 'what would Christ think of Imperialism?' He asked the question 'What is Patriotism?' and replied

The patriot will answer "love of country". But we Socialists feel that such an answer is not true. The Socialist loves his country, and loves his countrymen and countrywomen; yet the Socialist will not write himself a patriot [because that] means also the desire to exalt our own country above all others, to enhance the glory or extend the power of Britain at the expense of all the other nations of the earth. If Patriotism really meant true love of our native land, then I should claim that Socialists are patriots, and I should go farther and claim Socialists are the only true patriots since they alone are striving for the real honour and the real welfare and the real advancement of their nation.¹⁰

His 'patriotism' before the war had been antagonistic to extension of the empire; it had been inward-looking. 'England for the English' had meant also Africa for the Africans'.¹¹ The national interest could only be served within England's borders. He had seen it as compatible with internationalism, which was nobler than patriotism since it was not so narrow.¹² But Blatchford's position on the outbreak of the Boer War was not a complete reversal of his pre-war stance. He had argued that while it was better not to have an empire to start with, the empire was a reality and that fact had to be faced. 'We ought never to have conquered India,' he wrote,

Very well. But we *did* conquer it, and we must govern and defend it, or we must give it up. And if we are to give it up, to whom is it to be given, and *when*, and *how*? And in the meantime what? ... For my part, I am a sincere advocate of peace, and an unwavering opponent of war. And, being what I am, I am in favour of keeping a large and efficient fleet, of strengthening the defences of our empire, and of making our army as fit as science and discipline can make it.¹³

Blatchford saw in the Boer War a threat to the empire. He therefore supported Britain. He had also served in the army for six years and, as his biographer has pointed out, Blatchford devoted seventy-six pages of his autobiography to his army years, and only sixteen pages to the period from 1893 to 1910.¹⁴ Again and again he wrote of his old regiment, the 103rd Fusiliers or 'Ramchunders'. When war broke out 'the religion of *esprit de corps*' returned to him and he could not side with the Boers against men he did not know but considered friends.¹⁵ This combined with an almost total lack of consistent socialist theory. Neither did he have the Liberal Little England tradition to fall back upon. Blatchford had been a proponent of the Fourth

10 Clarion, 27 May 1899.

11 Clarion, 4 March 1893. This was not however the issue in 1899.

12 Clarion, 27 May 1899.

13 Clarion, 4 Feb 1899.

14 Thompson, Robert Blatchford, p.9.

15 Robert Blatchford, My Eighty Years, Cassell, 1931, p.37.

Clause, stating that where no socialist or labour candidate stood in an election ILPers should abstain, which was a response to the Lancashire working class's rejection of Liberalism.¹⁶ One further ingredient went into the recipe for Blatchford's support for the war. As has already been shown, the failure of the ILP at the 1895 elections had resulted in much disillusionment among British socialists.¹⁷ Blatchford was more deeply affected than most, having backed the abortive plans for unity between the SDF and ILP. Thompson comments that Blatchford's 'former idols, Thoreau, Ruskin, Whitman, Carpenter, went toppling ... so he came to rest more and more upon the old, sure things: Sally [his wife], the family, home, England, the English-speaking peoples of the Empire. They were not perfect. But they existed. And where could one see, smell, touch the united workers of the world, the Brotherhood of Man?'¹⁸

Blatchford's socialism became increasingly national. He came to believe that the Empire was necessary for the achievement of socialism in England.¹⁹ He argued that British workers had much to lose if the Empire fell. 'They have liberty to lose. They have free speech, a free Press, and free education to lose,' he wrote. To justify this support of imperialism he noted the 'fact that England is universally admitted to be the best colonising power the world has known, and the gentlest and wisest ruler over subject races'.²⁰ In the years that followed it was to be this imperial England and Englishness, that Blatchford urged Britons to defend.

Fabianism and the Empire

Blatchford later tried to reconcile his support for an imperialist war with socialism by denying the two were connected. The Boer War was, he wrote, 'a matter of international politics and had nothing to do with Socialism'.²¹ Most of the Fabian Society felt it wise to say the same. Bernard Shaw urged Edward Pease, the Society's secretary, 'Don't let us, after all these years, split the Society by declaring ourselves on a non-socialist point of policy'.²² The Society's executive committee shared this view. 'The question is outside the special province of the Society,' it

16 See H.M. Pelling, The Origins of the Labour Party 1880-1900, second edition, Oxford UP, Oxford, 1966, pp.97,121; David Howell, British Workers and the Independent Labour Party 1888-1906, Manchester UP, Manchester, 1983, Chapter 9.

17 See p.54 above.

18 Thompson, Robert Blatchford, pp.146-147.

19 Logie Barrow, The Socialism of Robert Blatchford and the Clarion 1889-1918, unpublished PhD, University of London, 1975, pp.392, 394.

20 Clarion, 13 July 1901.

21 Blatchford, My Eighty Years, p.200.

22 Michael Holroyd, Bernard Shaw Volume II 1898-1918 The Pursuit of Power, Chatto and Windus, 1989, p.36.

declared.²³ Pease, in his role as historian of the Society, correctly stated that 'in this matter the left and right wings of the Fabians joined hands in opposition to the centre.'²⁴ Those with socialist or Liberal leanings opposed the war and rejected the Society's silence, since it suggested acquiescence towards imperialism.²⁵

S.G. Hobson's motion opposing the war at the Society's meeting of 8 December 1899 was put in terms of a mixture of socialism and radical patriotism. It proposed that the Society 'formally dissociates itself from the Imperialism of Capitalism and vainglorious Nationalism' because 'the phase of Imperialist passion that has over-run this country of recent years ... has debased the conscience and lowered the democratic spirit of the English people'.²⁶ The outcome of the subsequent debates was that the members of the Society narrowly voted (by 259 to 217 votes) not to make a pronouncement on the war. About fifteen members then resigned, including some prominent names such as Ramsay MacDonald and J. Frederick Green (both on the executive committee), George Barnes and Pete Curran (future Labour MPs), Walter Crane, H.S. Salt, Mrs J.R. MacDonald and Mrs Pankhurst. Those remaining jokingly called this 'the Boer Trek'.²⁷

The Fabian Society having refused to make a pronouncement on the war now sought to formulate its views on imperialism; Bernard Shaw drafted a one-hundred page pamphlet entitled Fabianism and the Empire. It would appear at first that it was a rejection of British liberal nationalism and non-interference, which it condemned with the word most anathema to Fabianism as 'individualistic'.²⁸ Yet it justified imperialism in thoroughly Fabian terms:

Now the notion that a nation has a right to do what it pleases with its own territory, without reference to the interests of the rest of the world, is no more tenable from the International Socialist point of view ... than the notion that a landlord has a right to do what he likes with his estate without reference to the interests of his neighbours.²⁹

Of course, 'theoretically' the world's resources should be 'inter-nationalized', it declared, 'but until the Federation of the World becomes an accomplished fact, we

23 Fabian News, Feb 1900.

24 Edward R. Pease, The History of the Fabian Society, Fiffeld, 1916, p.129.

25 For the chronology of the debate and referendum on the issue see Pease, History of the Fabian Society, pp.129-131, and Fabian News, Dec 1899 to March 1900.

26 Fabian News, Dec 1900.

27 Beatrice Webb, Our Partnership, edited by Barbara Drake and Margaret I. Cole, London School of Economics and Political Science/Cambridge UP, Cambridge, 1975, p.193.

28 Fabianism and the Empire: A Manifesto by the Fabian Society, edited by Bernard Shaw, Grant Richards, 1901, pp.2-3. See Pease, History of the Fabian Society, p.134 for membership involvement in discussing Shaw's draft.

29 Fabianism and the Empire, pp.44-45.

must accept the most responsible Imperial federations available as a substitute for it.³⁰ The Fabians proclaimed themselves the true internationalists, and the socialist opponents of the war 'ultra-nationalist, ultra Gladstonian, [and] old Liberal to the fingertips'.³¹

A.M. McBriar supports the Fabian argument; 'they did not believe England's [civilisation] was so much higher than that of her other Western neighbours - France, Germany, Italy, or America.... The Fabian's standard of "higher civilization" was a European standard.'³² But the Fabian Society had always seen itself as the champion of 'English Socialism' against Continental socialism.

Webb's article of 1901 courting the Liberal Imperialists urged them to address 'a burning feeling of shame at the "failure" of England' and called for National, not European, Efficiency and 'virility in government - virility in South Africa [and] virility in *our* relations with the rest of the world'.³³ Lenin, another socialist forced to examine the question of nationalism from the point of view of a socialist in an imperial nation, in a polemic against Great Russian socialists who rejected Poland's right to self-determination on the grounds of proletarian internationalism, accused them of echoing bourgeois chauvinism. The point was, he wrote, that 'in the capitalist state, repudiation of the right to self-determination, i.e., the right of nations to secede, means nothing more than the defence of the privileges of the dominant nation.'³⁴ This applies to the Fabian Society. In the name of internationalism, they supported British imperialism.

An extreme example of this appears in a pamphlet by J. Ernest Jones called The Case for Progressive Imperialism.³⁵ Jones subtitled his own name as 'Fabian and ILP'.³⁶ Jones supported the idea of a world-state. He rejected the following as Individualism under other names:

Every country speaking its own language, nationalism, national and racial sentiment, national patriotism, national freedom, national non-intervention or non-interference, insular treatment of world questions, the claim of nationality and national independence.³⁷

30 Fabianism and the Empire, p.24.

31 Sidney Webb, 'Lord Rosebery's Escape from Houndsditch,' Nineteenth Century, vol. 50, Sept 1901, p.374.

32 A.M. McBriar, Fabian Socialism and English Politics, 1884-1918, Cambridge UP, 1962, pp.128-131.

33 'Lord Rosebery's Escape,' pp.374-375, 385. Emphasis added.

34 V.I. Lenin, Selected Works in Three Volumes, volume 1, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1976, p.590.

35 J. Ernest Jones, The Case for Progressive Imperialism, second edition, privately published, November 1902.

36 ILP News, Feb 1903 repudiated the pamphlet.

37 Jones, Progressive Imperialism, p.3.

Hence one would think that Jones, by rejecting all the above, would have no time for English nationalism. But that was not the case. He continued:

It must here be shown the foolishness and futility of disloyalty to England and the English Empire. Why is it foolish? Because English civilisation and liberty, in spite of all its faults, is the best and widest and most tolerant in the world.³⁸

He directed his deepest criticism at the Irish, who he accused of Little Englandism, their nationalism being caused by their audacity in having a different religion from England and a 'useless' language.³⁹ The world, he declared, needed but one language; opposition to 'the stamping out of languages' would only be 'sentiment',⁴⁰ and not surprisingly he decided that this one language should be English. He concluded that annexing other countries was not stealing if it was for those countries', and the world's, benefit.⁴¹ Jones was an extreme proponent of this internationalisation through British imperialism, and it was through the acceptance of many of the hegemonic ideas of imperialism, framed in language expressing the intention to civilise and take liberty to the world, that enabled him to deny nationalist feelings while in fact espousing them.

Patriotic Opposition to the War

Liberal opponents of the war certainly did not reject ideas of patriotism. Unionists in the 1900 general election urged voters to 'have nothing to do with such traitors to their countrymen fighting for Britain, but VOTE FOR THE UNIONIST CANDIDATE!' and declared that every vote for a non-Unionist was a Boer bullet fired at British soldiers.⁴² Liberal opponents of the war, however, claimed a higher patriotism. At an anti-war public meeting some months before the war started, George W.E. Russell of the Transvaal Committee condemned

The advocates of war [who] are prostituting the sacred names of freedom and justice to glorify money-getting and justify bloodshed. We protest against such people monopolizing the name of patriot. We are the true and real patriots. (Cheers). We do not go swaggering about the world like a company of mercenary swashbucklers, but we are none the less patriotic on that account. Surely we have a better claim to the title of patriots when we stand for the fair fame of Christian England amongst the civilized nations of the world. (Cheers).⁴³

38 Progressive Imperialism, p.6.

39 Progressive Imperialism, pp.6, 8, 9. He also accused the ILP of having been 'captured' by the Irish, p.7.

40 Progressive Imperialism, p.14.

41 Progressive Imperialism, p.20.

42 John S. Galbraith, 'The Pamphlet Campaign on the Boer War,' Journal of Modern History, vol. XXIV, 1952, p.116; Arthur Davey, The British Pro-Boers 1877-1902, Tafelberg, Cape Town, 1978, p.56.

43 Stephen Koss (ed.), The Pro-Boers: The Anatomy of an AntiWar Movement, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1973, p.8. See also pp. xxvii-xxviii, 8, 33, 66, 94, 130.

A.J.P. Taylor has remarked that 'it was possible to be a Dissenter and a patriot at the same time,'⁴⁴ and Arthur Davey says of the pro-Boers that 'in their own elevated view they were patriots who served their country's best interests just as Burke and Chatham had done in the 18th century when they had warned against the alienation of the American colonists.'⁴⁵

Socialists followed such thinking. This was not novel for socialists in 1899. Elijah Copland, president of the Newcastle branch of the Democratic Federation, had declared fifteen years previously that:

War in the defence of the liberties of a people, or in opposition to acts of aggression, whether of foreign or native foes, is justifiable - nay, it is noble, and calculated to develop some of the grandest traits in the human character - self-sacrifice, devotion, bravery, endurance, patriotism. But when have we, in England, had such a struggle? Our latter-day escapades have been onslaughts on weak and so called barbarous nations.⁴⁶

Again and again socialist opponents of the war took up this radical patriotic theme. As tension rose before the outbreak of war, Smart in ILP News set the tone: 'the infamous conduct of the Government in its negotiations with the Transvaal,' he wrote, 'must be a cause of rage and humiliation to every honest patriot.' And what should the ILPers do? 'It concerns the honour of every self-respecting lover of his country to protest with all the power that is in him against the atrocious crime which we are apparently about to commit.... Though the cause may be unpopular yet shall the words of Socialists be heard.'⁴⁷ 'Marxian' (George Hilleary Samuel) on the front page of the Labour Leader on 21 October 1899 echoed such statements, 'in respect to the true honour and greatness of England, I yield to no one,' he wrote,

I wish with a deep yearning, to see England the worthy leader of the world ... but I perceive nothing to England's benefit in the temporary triumph of certain long-nursed schemes which have, at last, driven two small republics to defy us to death. Were those Republics British, and were Britain a foreign giant, how every Briton would cheer their lonely courage!

Again Smart returned to the issue. 'We love our country,' he wrote, 'but we cannot support it when we believe it to be in the wrong, nor do we think we should manifest our love by doing so.'⁴⁸ In the report of the NAC to the 1901 ILP conference it was stated that a NAC resolution had called the war one 'of aggression ... especially

44 The Trouble Makers: Dissent over Foreign Policy, 1792-1939, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1985, p.109.

45 The British Pro-Boers, p.11.

46 Elijah Copland, Guarantees Against Unlawful War, Democratic Federation, Newcastle, 1884, p.4.

47 ILP News, Sept 1899.

48 ILP News, Nov 1899.

humiliating to the democratic instincts of this country'. The following year, Glasier as Chairman spoke of the ILP as defenders of the national honour:

They had kept inviolable the name of their native land; they had done more for England than all the gold of the Transvaal would ever do.... [The Government] had uprooted their national honour, it had withered their military fame, it had thrown away the lives of some 15,000 of their soldiers in the flower of life.... It had thrown away their good name, and their reputation for fair play and for freedom. England was never so little, never so despised, never so poor, as it was to-day.... The big Englishers had wrought this havoc.⁴⁹

From the nature of the sources of these utterances, (ILP News was aimed solely at members,) it can be suggested that the official ILP policy on the war was one of radical patriotism.

The ILP were not alone in using such arguments against the war. Alex Thompson of the Clarion once more came under attack. 'A genial correspondent writes to announce that my recent articles are a disgrace to Socialism and to me,' he recorded in a Clarion leader. "'The lowest of men,'" he affirms - I trust he is not referring to himself - "have always desired this country's glory. But you are doing your best to turn the people against their own country.'" Thompson denied this. 'What I mean is just the opposite - to make the people so fond of their country that they shall desire to possess it, and to rescue it out of the hands of heartless bullies who would squander its heart's blood and prostitute its honour to serve their greed and avarice.'⁵⁰ Neither were the Marxist SDF immune from such utterances. F. Reginald Statham believed that 'the British Empire [had] been built up on a foundation of justice and constitutional liberty, and we can only endanger the Empire by flying in the face of these principles.'⁵¹ A leader in Justice by John Ellam, a year into the war and after the general election results, gave a sigh of despair:

Alas! England to-day is not the England of our forefathers. Neither are the men of England of the same type as those who won for her a proud pre-eminence among the nations as the land of freedom and of staunch independent manhood.⁵²

The socialist pro-Boers were encouraged in their national rather than class assessment of the war by two factors. One was an idealistic and mythical conception of the Boer agrarian lifestyle. The second was the proposition that the war was being fought not so much for England, as for cosmopolitan (that is, Jewish) financiers.

Many socialists looked wistfully at the rural life of the Boer farmer, seeing in it

49 ILP Conference Reports, 1900, p.3; 1901, p.28.

50 Clarion, 13 Jan 1900. Thompson had used this same letter before to defend his version of patriotism, see Clarion, 1 Feb 1896, p.45 above.

51 'South Africa in the Past and Future' in Social-Democrat, Feb 1900. Re-published as a pamphlet by Twentieth Century Press, 1900.

52 Justice, 27 Oct 1900.

both the English past before capitalism and the vision of an English future after capitalism. Hardie is the best known for entertaining this sentimental view. It was linked to the anti-industrial tendency in British socialism:

As a pastoral people the Boers doubtless have all the failings of the fine qualities which pertain to that mode of life; but whatever these failings may have been they are virtues compared to the turbid pollution and refined cruelty which is inseparable from the operations of capitalism. As Socialists, our sympathies are bound to be with the Boers. Their Republican form of Government bespeaks freedom, and is thus hateful to tyrants, whilst their methods of production are much nearer our ideal than any form of exploitation for profit.⁵³

The Boers, it was believed, had the virtues most admired by British socialists. They were fighting heroically for freedom and national independence; according to the ILP NAC: 'In the history of the world there are many instances of heroic defence of national rights and liberties, and the heroism of the Boers in the present war will enrich such record and occupy an honoured place amongst them.'⁵⁴ Or, according to ILP News, they were fighting 'in the defence of home and freedom' and 'their greatest fault is that they love too well their freedom, [for] which they would rather die than yield.'⁵⁵ John Lister urged the Boers to fight for the 'sturdy democratic rule of manly folk .../ Stand for Right and Freedom./ Stem the raid for gold!'⁵⁶ while Arthur Hickmott gave much the same message, 'Patriots, young and old/ Forward for hearth and home!/ Down with "the tools of gold"...'.'⁵⁷ Hardie told the House of Commons that

the men who are in the field against us are not merely men of courage but men of honour and self-respect. They are fighting probably as much for the principle of being treated as men as from any other cause. These men are patriots in the fullest sense of the term.... They are a people who love freedom.⁵⁸

What made these supposed virtues of the Boers so important to British socialists was that they believed them to be lost English virtues. Willie Wright called the Boers 'a liberty loving people like the British', and Hardie advised his readers to 'try to imagine what the free Yeomen of England were 200 years ago, and you have some idea of Boer life'.⁵⁹ Reginald Statham described them as having 'the patriotism

53 Labour Leader, 6 Jan 1900.

54 ILP Conference Report 1901, p.3.

55 ILP News, Nov 1899 and Jan 1900.

56 Labour Leader, 14 Oct 1899.

57 Justice, 7 April 1900.

58 House of Commons Parliamentary Debates, 4th Series, vol. 88, cols. 300-303, 7 Dec 1900.

59 Labour Leader, 18 Nov 1899, 17 March 1900.

of the old-world Englishmen'.⁶⁰ The virtue of the Boers, then, was that they were a pre-industrial, agrarian (and, needless to say, a white) people, far enough away to be idealised, as British socialists had idealised the English past. The Boers were unconsciously seen as fighting by proxy the war against capitalism that in England had been lost. Hardie argued that the Boers did not arm themselves to fight the British but to protect themselves from the 'devilish designs of Rhodes and Co'. They fought British troops not because they were British, but because they represented capitalism.⁶¹ In this way, the issues at stake in the war were confused. The capitalism threatening the Boer republics may have been British, but that did not mean it represented the true England. And the argument could generally be reinforced by anti-semitism.

H.M. Hyndman is perhaps the most infamous anti-semite among early socialists, his biographer maintaining that 'even at a time when anti-semitism was not uncommon in left-wing political circles, Hyndman gave much offence.'⁶² One of his lecture titles was 'The Four Internationals: The Jews, the Catholics, the Monarchs, the Socialists', with only the last-named being spoken of in a good light. In this list, 'the Jews' serve for capitalists.⁶³ Hyndman's first written comment on the war described it as 'The Jew's War on the Transvaal' and blamed the 'Jew-Jingo press' and the British ruling class run by 'their masters, the capitalist Jews'.⁶⁴ Despite much criticism of this anti-semitism, an SDF Manifesto of January 1900 called 'War in South Africa' still maintained that it was 'a war of aggression on behalf of cosmopolitan millionaires'.⁶⁵ The ILP seemed determined to outdo Hyndman in anti-semitism.⁶⁶ ILP News of October 1899 thought it

worth noting, by-the-bye, that the most prominent of the Jingo organs are owned and financed largely by stalwart patriots whose names have curiously foreign terminations and whose features seem to indicate they are of the circumcision. In whatever walk of life the Jew adopts he generally becomes pre-eminent, and the stock exchange Jew is no exception to the rule. He is the incarnation of the money idea and it is no exaggeration to say that the Jew financier controls the policy of Europe.

60 The South African Crisis: The Truth About the Transvaal, Twentieth Century Press, n.d., 1899 (pre-war), p.5.

61 Labour Leader, 17 March 1900.

62 Chushichi Tsuzuki, H.M Hyndman and British Socialism, edited by Henry Pelling, Oxford UP, 1961, p.128.

63 Justice, 10 March 1900.

64 Justice, 7 Oct 1899, in Bill Baker, The Social Democratic Federation and the Boer War, Our History pamphlet 59, 1974, pp.5-6.

65 Baker, The SDF and the Boer War, p.7.

66 This is a point that Colin Holmes underestimates in Anti-Semitism and British Society 1876-1939, Edward Arnold, 1979. The ILP receives three lines attention, while Hyndman gets nearly a whole page, pp.68, 69.

Hardie also noted that the section of the press clamouring for war was owned by 'mostly foreigners'.⁶⁷ On two occasions at least the Labour Leader mocked foreign 'patriots', printing the following alleged advertisement:

MOSES COHEN
Patriotic Grocer
Buy our Union Jack Safety Matches
(made in Sweden)
Sparkling Lump. Khaki Brand
(pure German beet)
'Old England' Flour
(finest American)
Imperial Stove Polish
(Swiss manufacture)⁶⁸

Later Labour Leader made an allegation about an 'army contractor with a Jewish name who supplied the Militia with brown paper boots at 12s 6d a pair, which he had bought for 5s 9d'.⁶⁹ An unsigned article on 'England's Degeneration' attributed this 'degeneration' to the influence of Disraeli, who was of course, 'of Eastern blood, of excitable and grandiose character, with scarce a single spark of true patriotism in his blood'.⁷⁰ Such outbursts were given a measure of respectability by the publication of J.A. Hobson's The War in South Africa: Its Causes and Effects which seemed to back up the anti-semitism with empirical evidence. Hobson's thesis on imperialism was that a surplus of capital in Britain caused by under-consumption led to investors looking elsewhere for more profitable investment, and he included a sub-plot within this thesis when it came to discussing South Africa:

We are fighting in order to place a small international oligarchy of mine-owners and speculators in power at Pretoria. Englishmen will surely do well to recognise that the economic and political destinies of South Africa are, and seem likely to remain, in the hands of men most of whom are foreigners by origin, whose trade is finance, and whose trade interests are not chiefly British.⁷¹

Peter Clarke's interpretation of The War in South Africa suggests that 'Hobson wanted to confute twice over the patriotic claim that the interests at stake were "national": once by showing that they were sectional, and again by showing that they were cosmopolitan'.⁷² The majority of the British left followed Hobson down this path, combining an element of class interpretation of the war with a left-wing,

67 Labour Leader, 14 Oct 1899.

68 Labour Leader, 19 May 1900.

69 Labour Leader, 8 Feb 1902.

70 Labour Leader, 14 Dec 1901.

71 The War in South Africa, James Nisbet, 1900, p.197. For reviews see Clarion, 17 March 1900 and Justice 24 March 1900. Both urge socialists to read it.

72 Peter Clarke, Liberals and Social Democrats, Cambridge UP, Cambridge, 1978, p.92.

but anti-semitic, nationalism, which allowed them to make claims that 'the man who is pro-Boer is the true patriot and the best friend of England.'⁷³ This also meant that socialists could brand those who supported the war as somehow un-English, or at least as acting in a manner harmful to England as a nation. They found the jingo mobs especially shocking, seeing them as an outburst of irrationality.⁷⁴ Hyndman's second volume of autobiography, published ten years after the end of the Boer War, described vividly his impressions of the scenes in London:

The display of hysterical and even maniacal joy and exuberance on Mafeking night in London surpassed in unseemly indecency anything I could have imagined. The whole manifestation spoke of a people in decay.... It was nothing short of an orgy. I saw myself girls of respectable appearance, and ordinarily, no doubt, of modest demeanour, carrying on with men whom they did not know after a fashion that women of the loosest life would have hesitated to adopt. This, too, early in the day and in the open street.⁷⁵

Justice at least twice described 'mafficking' as 'bestial',⁷⁶ and the SDF were not alone in looking disgustedly upon such scenes. The ILP conference of 1901 resolved

That the displays of rowdyism and worse which were observable in the streets and public places after the relief of Mafeking, the capture of Pretoria, the return of the C[ity] I[mperial] V[olunteers] and on other occasions merit the serious attention of all who have the welfare of the nation at heart, as they seem to betoken a loss of dignity and a degeneration of the character of the race. That this conference regrets this degeneration, considering that the power to take joy and grief calmly indicated the innate stubbornness and self-control of the people and that these are among the greatest attributes of a great nation.⁷⁷

As the war dragged on, such patriotic exuberance became far less common. Justice and Labour Leader respectively reported with relief the 'Decay of the Mafficking Spirit' and the absence of 'Police and Patriots' from an anti-war meeting in mid-1901, and the subsequent declining popularity of the Unionist government.⁷⁸

The formation of a policy of opposition to the war on the basis of a supposed British standard of conduct meant that opposition was not necessarily based on anti-imperialism, but on opposition to imperialism as practised. This allowed James Ramsay MacDonald actually to frame an imperial policy for the Labour Party based on many of the hegemonic imperial assumptions. MacDonald visited South Africa in 1902, Canada, Australia and New Zealand in 1906, India in 1909, and he served

73 Keir Hardie in Labour Leader, 17 March 1900.

74 Miles Taylor, 'Patriotism, History and the Left in Twentieth Century Britain,' Historical Journal, vol. 33, no. 4, 1990, pp.974-975.

75 H.M. Hyndman, Further Reminiscences, Macmillan, 1912, p.172.

76 Justice, 2 and 30 June 1900.

77 ILP, Conference Report, 1901, p.43.

78 Justice, 25 May 1901; Labour Leader, 29 June 1901.

on the Royal Commission on the Indian Civil Service in late 1912 and early 1913. MacDonald certainly did not reject imperialism, seeing in it something virtuous:

So far as the underlying spirit of Imperialism is a frank acceptance of national duty exercised beyond the nation's political frontiers, so far as it is a claim that a righteous nation is by its nature restless to embark upon crusades of righteousness wherever the world appeals for help, the spirit of Imperialism cannot be condemned.... I want to make it clear that however successful designing men may be in prostituting the high purposes of the nations to their own ends, or however imperfectly the nations themselves interpret their ideals in their political policies, the compulsion to expand and to assume world responsibility is worthy at its origin.⁷⁹

With his organicist conception of history and his deep dislike of sudden change, MacDonald was also inclined to argue that the present was so much the prisoner of the past that there was no point at all in trying to escape:

The question of Empire cannot be decided on first principles, so far as this country is concerned. We have a history, and it is an Imperial one.... [We cannot] re-write history, to undo evil.... We have gone so far in our Imperial history that we can hardly look back. We can be guided in our future work; we cannot re-cut and re-carve the past.⁸⁰

But then he did not believe that Britain's past had been any obstacle to his politics. He believed Britain's rulers had been largely liberal in the past:

The rulers, already showing indications of a love of liberty and intellectual and religious toleration, were welcoming to our cities the skilled and industrious heretics and nonconformists, who on the Continent were being offered the alternative of death or exile. Whilst Spain and Portugal were exploiting America, England was increasing its national wealth, creating a fine type of manhood, and developing a national spirit.⁸¹

On the whole, therefore, he felt imperialism was a part of British national history with which Britain could be trusted. He was disappointed with Gladstone, 'whose mind was singularly unresponsive to the tidal impulses of the national spirit.... Instead of recognising and using the new tendency [of imperialism], the democratic leaders simply opposed it and they failed.'⁸² He rejected the break-up of the Empire, arguing that it would lead to greater militarism, for if Britain's army and navy would be reduced in size, 'the burden which would be shifted from our backs would be

79 'The Propaganda of Civilisation,' International Journal of Ethics, July 1901, in Bernard Porter, Critics of Empire: British Radical Attitudes to Colonialism in Africa 1895-1914, Macmillan, 1968, pp.185-186.

80 Ethical World, 12 Nov 1898, in Porter, Critics of Empire, p.189.

81 J. Ramsay MacDonald, Labour and the Empire Harvester, Hassocks, 1974, first published 1907, p.5.

82 Labour and the Empire, pp.13-14.

imposed upon others, and I think we are entitled to claim that an armed Britain is as unlikely to disturb the peace of the world as any other military power ... The British Empire under democratic custodianship can be a powerful element in the maintenance of peace and the promotion of the international spirit.⁸³

But MacDonald did want to see reform of the Empire. The flagship of his proposed policy was the Imperial Standard, and this was very much a 'British' standard, for

when the expression 'British' is used in civil matters it implies something more than a mere description of racial or national origin. 'British' justice, 'British' honour, 'British' administration, carry to our minds certain qualities of justice, honour, and administration, and our Imperial policy has always been commended to our people at home - whenever they troubled their heads about it - on these moral or qualitative grounds.... Now the task of the democratic parties of the Empire is to establish guarantees that this moral quality will be preserved untainted.⁸⁴

This standard was to involve no slavery, untainted administration of justice, fair trials, law resting on consent - in short 'the inheritance which past experience has taught the present generation of Britons to cherish'.⁸⁵

The Imperial Standard effectively became Labour Party policy, and it was not anti-imperialism but an alternative imperialism, framed by MacDonald and based on assumptions, if not of British superiority then at least, of a British genius for government and administration that was of benefit to the colonised. In the ILP News of January 1898 MacDonald had argued against further extensions of the empire, but had hoped that 'the most democratic country in the world' would have the most influence. He made clear elsewhere which country he believed this to be, and other socialists shared his view. 'Marxian', after condemning jingoism in a column entitled 'Inebriated London', summed up thus:

Yet one cannot altogether disown the country of one's language and birth, simply because it happens to be inhabited by fools under deferred sentences of death. Despite my colder reason, despite my large admixture of Welsh blood, I love the name and fame of England. If one nation must lead, let England lead the light and freedom and justice of the newer days. And so, in my English prejudice, I cannot wish South Africa lost to England.⁸⁶

Marxists and Patriotism

It has been shown that while the ILP was united in opposition to the Boer War, the Clarion group and the Fabian Society were divided. The SDF was also subject to divisions, though these emanated from a left group which stood in opposition to all patriotism.

83 Labour and the Empire, pp.36-37.

84 Labour and the Empire, p.49.

85 Labour and the Empire, p.50.

86 Labour Leader, 29 Sept 1900.

Hyndman, the dominant character in the SDF from its foundation in 1884 to its effectual demise during the First World War, brought with him into socialism ideas about the nature of Englishness and imperialism. England for All, which Hyndman wrote for the founding conference of the Democratic Federation, had argued for internationalism, but took a route based on race rather than class. 'Surely those who are in favour of a unity of all peoples,' he argued,

who hold that in the near future the men who have hitherto worked for others will see that in common action lies the hope of humanity, cannot fail ere long to understand that the first step towards this great end must be a closer and yet closer union of peoples of the same race, language, and political traditions, working together for the good of all portions of that noble federation.⁸⁷

Hence, as the Fabians and elements in the ILP were to do, Hyndman saw a progressive role for the British in world politics. And he based his ideas on a belief in the nature of the English. 'We are, or might be,' Hyndman wrote, 'the leaders and protectors of freedom, independence, and true liberty in Europe.'⁸⁸ But, as Eric Hobsbawm has warned, Hyndman was not the SDF.⁸⁹ Hyndman's views on race, nation and imperialism were challenged from within the SDF again and again. Thus, in 1884, as the nation discussed General Gordon in the Sudan, Justice declared that 'right or wrong, Gordon went to Khartoum as the envoy of the people of England, and we ought to get him out of his dangerous mission if we can.' Two weeks later an editorial, while condemning the sending of troops to begin with, attacked the Liberal government for Gordon's abandonment.⁹⁰ Ernest Belfort Bax wrote a letter condemning such support for imperialism, and calling Gordon 'neither more nor less than a traitor'.⁹¹ But such minor attacks were not enough to divert Hyndman. In September, he wrote of England's duty:

It is, we hold, the duty of a Democratic England, having cleared herself of greed and oppression, at home and abroad, to stand before the world as the champion of the liberties of Europe.... Such an opportunity of international usefulness and greatness unalloyed with any mean ideas of national "glory" lies before us in the immediate future.⁹²

Standing alone, such sentiments did not sound entirely incompatible with socialism, but Hyndman combined them with a general dislike of foreigners. Eleanor Marx

87 Hyndman, England for All: The Textbook of Democracy, Harvester, Brighton, 1973, first published 1881, p.162.

88 England for All, pp.170-171.

89 'Hyndman and the SDF' in E.J. Hobsbawm, Labouring Men: Studies in the History of Labour, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968, pp.233-234.

90 Justice, 26 April and 10 May 1884. The latter editorial was written by one of Hyndman's supporters, C.L. Fitzgerald.

91 Justice, 24 May 1884.

92 Justice, 13 Sept 1884.

commented to Wilhelm Liebknecht that 'Mr. Hyndman, whenever he could do so with impunity, has endeavoured to set Englishmen against "foreigners",' and William Morris wrote of his 'attacks on foreigners as foreigners or at least sneers at them'.⁹³ Hyndman's attitude to empire played a part in the split at the end of 1884 that led to the formation of the Socialist League, which once again left Hyndman in control of the SDF. He celebrated this by reprinting the final passage of England for All envisaging England's leading role under the title 'The Socialist's Patriotism', and editorialising on the 'Death of a Hero', as the news of Gordon's demise had reached Britain: he was, Justice moralised, 'butchered by the ferocious hordes of the Mahdi'.⁹⁴

The capture of the Socialist League by anarchists in the late 1880s saw the return of the anti-imperialists to the SDF, and with rising imperial tensions the debate inside the SDF was resumed. It has been suggested that it was a speech by William Morris at the SDF's New Year's gathering in 1896 that led to outright condemnation of the Jameson Raid, though Hyndman still managed to give 'thanks to Mr Chamberlain's active interference [that meant that] we were clear ... as a nation, of responsibility' for the raid.⁹⁵ He did not believe the raid to be the result of truly British intentions in South Africa, but 'part of a great project for the constitution of an Anglo-Hebraic Empire in Africa'.⁹⁶

While Hyndman still saw the Empire as a step along the road to internationalism, with diversions from that road largely caused by a sinister Jewish International, Bax saw it as an expedient of capitalism to prolong its life:

It is high time the socialist working classes became thoroughly alive to the fact that ... every new market opened up is an obstacle in the way of their own emancipation.... It is a thing of vital importance to the early realisation of Socialism to stem the tide of annexation and colonial expansion without delay.⁹⁷

When the Boer War broke out in 1899, Hyndman's response was again to attack Jews, provoking outrage in the SDF, particularly from East End Jewish members, Bax and Theodore Rothstein. A Jewish emigré from Russia, who joined the SDF in 1895, Rothstein was not only critical of Hyndman, who, he said, seemed to have forgotten about class in his frenzy against Jews,⁹⁸ but also of that section of the left

93 Eleanor Marx quoted in Tsuzuki, Hyndman and British Socialism, p.61; The Letters of William Morris to His Family and Friends, edited by Philip Henderson, Longmans Green, 1951, p.228.

94 Justice, 24 Jan 1885, the section referred to is quoted on p.49 above; Justice, 14 Feb 1885.

95 Tsuzuki, Hyndman and British Socialism, p.125; Justice, 11 Jan 1896, in Baker, The SDF and the Boer War, p.3.

96 Quoted in Baker, The SDF and the Boer War, p.4.

97 Justice, 16 June 1894, in Porter, Critics of Empire, p.100.

98 Baker, The SDF and the Boer War, p.6.

which opposed the war on the grounds of morality, but nevertheless wished for British success for reasons of liberty and democracy. An article of his is worth quoting at length for its perceptiveness on the thinking of many British socialists:

To be brief, the argument is as follows: England, with her colonies, has been and still is the most progressive country in the world. Whatever her shortcoming in this or other respects, she always stood for democracy and political freedom, showing a bold and effective front to the reactionary forces in the world of international politics - to the aggressive despotism of Russia in particular - and serving by her example, active sympathy, and right of asylum as a great encouragement to those who struggle for liberty in other lands. The present unfortunate course of the war is, therefore, to be greatly lamented, if but for the reason that it has lowered the material and moral prestige of England, and has thus weakened the most progressive factor in contemporary history. Were it, however, to end in England's defeat ... the harm done to the cause of freedom all over the world would be incalculable ... [and Russia and Germany would gain ascendancy in Europe] ... we must, therefore, regardless of all other considerations, wish for English success.⁹⁹

This line of argument resulted in 'the cause of Democracy and Freedom being promoted, or even maintained, by crime and conquest'. On the contrary, he argued, the war was itself a product of growing reaction in England over the previous twenty-five years, and, were the British to win, it would only increase the reaction. He, like Bax, saw imperialism as an obstacle to socialism, hence were Britain to lose South Africa and subsequently the Empire

the gains would be that she would once and for all get rid of the imperialistic nightmare that has been sapping the very marrow of her bones. Freed from the most pernicious of red herrings that has ever been trailed across its path, the democracy of England will receive a new impetus and will then really be in a position to head the movement for progress and liberty all the world over.¹⁰⁰

This was along the lines of Marx's argument that 'in relation to the Irish worker he [the English worker] feels himself a member of the *ruling* nation and so turns himself into a tool of the aristocrats and capitalists *against Ireland*, thus strengthening their domination *over himself*.'¹⁰¹ It was an argument that, as Rothstein outlined, many British socialists rejected. He had also foreshadowed Lenin's ideas on 'revolutionary defeatism', which, again, the majority of British socialist opponents of the First World War were to reject, because they were too attached to ideas about English democracy and liberty.¹⁰²

Bax, however, did accept this argument. He was critical of ideas of 'British Freedom':

99 'The War and Democracy,' Social-Democrat, March 1900, p.71.

100 Social-Democrat, March 1900, pp.72, 73.

101 Marx and Engels, Correspondence 1846-1895 A Selection, Martin Lawrence, 1934, p.289.

102 See chapter 7.

There is an impression abroad [he wrote] among Englishmen and foreigners alike that England represents fairplay in the expression of opinion and personal freedom, above all other nations. This is a belief that has become traditional, and like many other traditional beliefs it is not often thought worth while to examine its basis. But if we enquire into the grounds on which it stands we shall find that British liberty in the sunlight of criticism does not look quite as green and fresh as in the halo of popular imagination.

He argued that the difference between the British and continental ruling classes was the former's 'superior astuteness' of knowing when to allow free speech and when to suppress it, allowing other agencies such as 'British Public Opinion' to act when the government chose not to. He pointed out that much of the British press did not need suppressing anyway, but that the government would act if it felt it necessary, as it had done so in Ireland during Queen Victoria's visit, seizing an entire edition of United Ireland.¹⁰³

Bax claimed that he had no feelings of patriotism, which he saw as a new religion replacing Christianity, worked up artificially by the press and politicians.¹⁰⁴ States and nations were not 'real, in the sense of an essential or articulation or stage of human society, but a mushroom growth dating from the close of the Middle Ages (*circa* fifteenth century),' he argued. 'If we can love a nation of forty millions we can love Humanity at once,' he continued, though failing to break entirely with ideas of Western superiority, 'or at least that section of humanity which stands on the same general level of development as ourselves, viz., the European peoples and their offshoots.'¹⁰⁵ He did not see patriotism as a static phenomenon, for, as he noted, 'up till quite recently to be patriotic meant to be opposed to the monarch and governing classes of your own country in the interests of the people of your country.' Yet he did not want to give encouragement to left-wing patriotism, for he concluded with:

a word of protest against any attempt to revive the word "patriotism", or to refurbish it for democratic purposes. Let us ... leave it to the designing rogues and beguiled fools now in possession of it. In its old sense the word has had its day. It is a bad word, at best, of necessity carrying with it the suggestion of race exclusiveness, even though this may be kept in the background, while at its worst it implies a glorification of national infamy. Social-Democrats want no "true patriotism", whatever that may mean. They want to do away with Patriotism altogether and substitute in its place the "Internationalism" of the class-conscious proletariat.¹⁰⁶

The Hyndmanite - Bax/Rothstein 'theoretical' debate naturally had repercussions inside the SDF. Bax and Rothstein were on the safer socialist ground of internation-

103 Justice, 19 May 1900.

104 E.B. Bax, Reminiscences and Reflexions of a Mid and Late Victorian, George Allen and Unwin, 1918, p.195.

105 Bax, 'Love of Country,' Social-Democrat, Sept 1900, pp.272, 274.

106 Bax 'Patriotism,' Justice, May Day supplement 1901.

alism, and hence when Hyndman counter-attacked he did so by declaring the war 'a struggle between two burglars.... The future of South Africa is, I believe, to the black man; and if I am going to agitate for the independence of anybody, it is for the independence of the splendid native tribes who are being crushed by the Boers and ourselves together.'¹⁰⁷ While Hyndman was genuinely concerned about the fate of subject peoples, this argument was, as Bax said, a 'red herring'.¹⁰⁸ Hyndman did not wish to see a British defeat, having expressed concern about the fate of the Empire in such an eventuality. He therefore argued that agitation against the war was a waste of time and money, the role of the SDF being to spread socialism. While he received the backing of the SDF executive, he subsequently resigned and Rothstein was elected top of the poll in the elections to the executive.¹⁰⁹

* * * * *

The left in Britain was not united on the question of the imperialist war in South Africa, even within its separate groupings, though apart from the Fabian Society, which saw some resignations, and a loss of influence for the Society, there were no really damaging divisions. Thus while the editor of the Clarion supported 'England', his staff were mainly pro-Boers, and the newspaper remained a forum for debate on the war issue. The ILP and SDF were generally against the war, though there were differences over whether a British or Boer victory should be hoped for. The majority of the British left opposed the war, and, whatever their views on the best outcome, they opposed it wholeheartedly, having to defend themselves from attack, both verbal and physical. The opposition in most cases was opposition based on a radical version of patriotism, and again and again they stressed their loyalty to 'their' country, opposing a radical interpretation of its interests to the official version of the 'national interest'. Traditions of radical patriotism had survived the socialist revival of the 1880s and came to be applied to contemporary events, particularly since the socialism of the ILP was based mainly on labourist ideas of independence, which one historian has called 'an insufficient basis for an analysis of imperialism.'¹¹⁰ This meant that the left shared many of the assumptions and terminology about the nature of England's role in the world with the ruling class, and this led to the strange paradox that pro-Boers often called for a swift victory by the British, thus limiting

107 Justice, 20 July 1901.

108 Justice, 3 Aug 1901.

109 Baker, The SDF and the Boer War, pp.10-12.

110 Geoffrey Foote, The Labour Party's Political Thought: A History, second edition, Croom Helm, 1986, p.51.

their campaigning to the nature of the post-war settlement, arguing for a magnanimous peace. Only elements within the SDF attempted to apply a socialist analysis to imperialism, and from there to patriotism and ideas about the nature of Englishness, which led them to reject such ideas. But the rise of Anglo-German antagonism in the years immediately after the war in South Africa were to put these elements under pressure, even within the SDF.

The Labour Party and Parliament 1906-1914

The Labour Representation Committee, which became the Labour Party in 1906, was formed in February 1900 as a coalition of trade union leaders, who wanted legislative protection from employers' and legal attacks, and that section of socialists who looked to state action to achieve socialism. These groups united against the SDF, who proposed that the new body should be based upon 'a recognition of the class war', to pass Keir Hardie's pragmatic-sounding amendment to establish

a distinct Labour group in Parliament, who shall have their own whips, and agree upon their policy, which must embrace a readiness to co-operate with any party which for the time being may be engaged in promoting legislation in the direct interests of labour, and be equally ready to associate themselves with any party in opposing measures having an opposite tendency.¹

The ILP socialists, even while recognising its limitations, saw the new Labour Party as the agency for socialist transformation in Britain, and it was no accident that it confined itself to parliamentary activity; as Ralph Miliband has observed, 'The Labour Party has not only been a parliamentary party; it has been a party deeply imbued by parliamentarism.'² This stemmed from a simple belief held by the mainstream left that the state was a neutral body entirely under the control of Parliament, itself capable of being brought under control of 'the people', once they had the vote. Generally it came to be accepted that parliament equalled state equalled nation (or at least the national will).

Barry Jones and Michael Keating have noted that the Labour Party and its immediate predecessors have 'rarely given any sustained attention to the form of state whose power and role [they] have pledged to extend' and have described this as 'sheer intellectual failure'.³ This failure had causes. Marx and Engels, from their position that 'the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles,' had been able to conclude that 'the executive of the modern State is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie.' In the wake of the Paris Commune, Marx noted that 'at the same pace at which the progress of modern industry developed, widened, intensified the class antagonism between

1 Henry Pelling, The Origins of the Labour Party 1880-1900, second edition, Oxford UP, Oxford, 1966, p.209.

2 Ralph Miliband, Parliamentary Socialism, second edition, Merlin, 1972, p.13.

3 Barry Jones and Michael Keating, Labour and the British State, Oxford UP, Oxford, 1985, pp.2-3.

capital and labour, the State power assumed more and more the character of the national power of capital over labour, of a public force organised for social enslavement, of an engine of class despotism.' Hence he argued that 'the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery, and wield it for its own purposes.' He pointed out that the Commune had established 'a working, not a parliamentary, body, executive and legislative at the same time'. This was to be the Marxist model for revolutionary change.⁴

Mainstream left thought in Britain rejected such a theory of the state. Bernard Shaw voiced the classical exposition of reformist socialism in Britain as early as 1891:

It is easy to say, Abolish the State; but the State will sell you up, lock you up, blow you up, knock you down, bludgeon, shoot, stab, hang - in short, abolish you, if you lift a hand against it. Fortunately, there is ... a fine impartiality about the policeman and the soldier, who are the cutting edge of the State power. They take their wages and obey their orders without asking questions. If those orders are to demolish the homestead of every peasant who refuses to take the bread out of his children's mouths in order that his landlord may have money to spend as an idle gentleman in London, the soldier obeys. But if his orders were to help the police to pitch his lordship into Holloway Gaol until he had paid an Income Tax of twenty shillings on every pound of his unearned income, the soldier would do that with equal devotion to duty. Now these orders come ultimately from the State - meaning in this country, the House of Commons.⁵

Hardie made the same conclusions. 'The State,' he wrote

is that form of organised society which has evolved through the process of the ages, and represents the aptitude for freedom and self-government to which any people has attained. The policeman and the soldier, for example, who are at the call of the landlord or the employer when tenant or workman becomes turbulent, exist by the will and under the express authority of those same tenants and workmen, who constitute a preponderating majority in the State, and without whose consent neither soldier nor policeman could continue to exist.... It is their votes which create the Parliament which creates the policeman and the soldier.⁶

This was the theory sent out to ILP branches and meetings; as the speakers' edition of an ILP leaflet explained, 'Socialists believe in the State. It is the masses using their political power for the good of the whole. The State is order and protection at the same time.' It recommended reading Hardie, and also Ramsay MacDonald's Socialism and Government.⁷ MacDonald was concerned about 'the ephemeral nature

4 Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Selected Works in One Volume, Lawrence and Wishart, 1968, pp.35, 37, 285, 287.

5 The Impossibilities of Anarchism, Fabian Tract No 45, 1893, p.26.

6 J. Keir Hardie, From Serfdom to Socialism, Harvester, Brighton, 1974, first published 1907, pp.6-7.

7 The Socialist State, ILP Position Leaflet No 2, ILP, n.d.

of the great bulk of the matter which we publish' compared to Continental socialist theory, especially since 'the growth of British democratic institutions and the characteristics of British political methods have a special and direct bearing upon Socialist theories and tactics.'⁸ Hence Socialism and Government aimed to deal with this lack of discussion of the role of the state. Yet for all his grandiloquence, MacDonald simply followed Shaw and Hardie; the state, he wrote, 'is the organised political personality of a sovereign people - the organisation of a community for making of its common will effectual by political means'. His claim that 'the State' was not the same as government, parliament, Whitehall, or even society, but almost a living entity of itself, that 'thinks and feels for the whole' added nothing to British socialist theory on the state.⁹ Elsewhere he had revealed his belief that Parliament was the central institution, not only to government but to the nation:

The most appropriate subject for the Democracy to study is history, and the most appropriate section of that study is the history of Parliament; because in the history of Parliament you are studying your own evolution. The history of the British Parliament is the history of the evolution of popular liberty in this country.... History read by historically minded men is not the record of failures, but a record of success right through.¹⁰

The belief that the state was a neutral body was made possible by a rejection of any theory of class struggle as the motor of social and economic change. Hardie had declared that propaganda of class hatred was foreign. He also claimed that 'there is no "ruling and oppressed class", in the Marxian sense of the terms in England now.... As a matter of fact, the whole thesis upon which the class war was formulated is now antiquated and out of date.'¹¹ He maintained the position that 'Socialism, it cannot be too often repeated, has nothing whatever to do with class antagonism.... The object of Socialism is to abolish all such class distinction.'¹² MacDonald also claimed that socialism did not come from the economic interests of a class:

The man through whom Socialism is to come is not to be the economic man, the class-conscious man, the man toiling with the muck rake. He is to be the man of ideals, of the historical spirit, the man in whose intelligence religion and sense of

8 'The Socialist Library Prospectus' April 1905 in J. Ramsay MacDonald, Socialism and Government, volume I, 2 volumes, ILP, 1909.

9 MacDonald, Socialism and Government I, pp.3-4, 17.

10 J.H.B. Masterman, The House of Commons: Its Place in National History, John Murray, 1908, pp.29-30. MacDonald was chairing one of the lectures upon which the book was based.

11 'An Indictment of the Class War', Labour Leader, 9 Sept 1904.

12 Labour Leader, 17 Aug 1901.

what is of good report will have a dominating influence, the generous and ungrudging co-operator with his fellows.¹³

MacDonald actually went so far as to declare, in the midst of massive industrial unrest, that 'it is the anti-Socialist who makes class appeals.'¹⁴

This rejection of class war and the belief that the state was neutral and did not function in the interests of a ruling class meant that Labour thinkers counted on, in the first instance, numbers, and in the second, the good sense of the civil service, police and army. As shown above, an 'English' socialism had been constructed which rejected violence and revolution. Reinforcing the idea that such methods were foreign was the belief that parliamentary democracy also made them unnecessary, for, as Glasier had commented:

Violent rebellion on the part of a portion of the workers is a hopeless expedient, so long as they must count upon the opposition of the State, backed up by the political support of the majority of the people, including the majority of the working class. When the insurrectionists form, or can hope by any manifestation of their resolution, to form the majority, they can also then form the State, and physical rebellion will be unnecessary.¹⁵

Labour politicians could not however reject class interests altogether. As Hardie noted after the election of thirty Labour MPs in January 1906, 'a Labour Party which did not menace Park Lane would not be worth its room in Parliament.'¹⁶ Yet despite an Edwardian electorate that was seventy per cent working class, where there was no shortage of constituencies in which the working class formed a majority, Labour leaders believed the appeal to class was not enough.¹⁷ Hence, Labour could make appeals to those outside the working class, as did Philip Snowden in Blackburn in 1900, assuring the electorate that 'Socialism is not merely for the poor widow, it was the cause of the small capitalist, the struggling professional man, and the poor shopkeeper.'¹⁸

13 MacDonald, Socialism and Government I, p.xxviii.

14 J. Ramsay MacDonald, The Socialist Movement, Thornton Butterworth, 1911, p.149.

15 J. Bruce Glasier, On Strikes, Labour Literature Society and Labour Press, Glasgow and Manchester, n.d. 1897?, p.18.

16 'The Labour Party: Its Aims and Policy,' National Review, vol. XLVI, Feb 1906, p.1007.

17 A.K. Russell, The Liberal Landslide: The General Election of 1906, David and Charles, Newton Abbot and Hampden, Connecticut, 1973, p.21, estimates that from a half to two-thirds of seats had a working-class majority. Duncan Tanner, Political Change and the Labour Party 1900-1918, Cambridge UP, Cambridge, 1990, p.128, has concluded that 'the electoral framework in which Edwardian political parties operated was not overwhelmingly biased against the working class, or against parties which were based more heavily on this social group.'

18 Blackburn Times, 29 September 1900, in Keith Laybourn, Philip Snowden: A Biography 1864-1937, Temple Smith, Aldershot, 1988, p.47. See also ILP leaflet, Socialism for Shopkeepers, Common Sense Politics no. 6, ILP, 1909.

The Labour view of the state led to the belief that Labour could actually become the state.¹⁹ Thus Labour, by rejecting ideas of class conflict, aimed to prove that it was a national rather than sectional party. In the same article in which Hardie had stated that Labour would have to 'menace Park Lane' he also warned that

The Labour Party, however, must concern itself with the wider issues of national life and policy. One of the claims we put forward is, that in the best and truest sense of the word we are a national party. We have no sectional interests to serve, and the things which we desire most are just those which would benefit the community as a whole.²⁰

MacDonald was keen to show in 1905 that 'an infusion of labour class representation into the House of Commons would ... not result in class, but in national legislation.'²¹ Unlike the Irish Party, MacDonald explained, the Labour Party 'is not at war but at peace with the nation'.²² Geoffrey Foote has commented, 'that Labour's interests should ever clash with the interests of the nation was incomprehensible to MacDonald.'²³ Such beliefs were bound to have an effect on the way in which Labour saw its role in Parliament and subsequently its behaviour there.

Labour in the House of Commons

The election of twenty-nine Labour MPs (with one MP joining the Labour Party after the election) in January 1906 brought great hopes to significant sections of the working class. The socialist movement grew rapidly. The number of SDF branches rose by 100 between 1906 and 1908, while the ILP, claiming 30,000 paid-up members, saw the establishment of 375 new branches between 1906 and 1909. The circulation of the Clarion reached 80,000 in 1908.²⁴ The Labour Leader exclaimed 'At last! Labour's first great pitched battle has borne such triumphant results as exceed our highest hopes,'²⁵ and the Tribune declared that 'for the vision of Mr. Redmond leading the Irish members to College Green, was substituted the picture of

19 See Stephen Yeo, 'Socialism, the State, and some Oppositional Englishness,' in Robert Colls and Philip Dodd (eds.), Englishness: Politics and Culture 1880-1920, Croom Helm, 1986, pp.308-369, especially pp.360-361.

20 'The Labour Party: Its Aims and Policy,' p.1007.

21 Rodney Barker, 'Socialism and Progressivism in the Political Thought of Ramsay MacDonald,' in A.J.A. Morris (ed), Edwardian Radicalism 1900-1914 Some Aspects of British Radicalism, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974, pp.123-124.

22 MacDonald, Socialism and Government I, p.xxvii.

23 Geoffrey Foote, The Labour Party's Political Thought: A History, second edition, Croom Helm, 1986, p.62.

24 Kenneth O. Morgan, 'Edwardian Socialism,' in Donald Read (ed.), Edwardian England, Croom Helm, 1982, pp.93-111.

25 Labour Leader, 19 Jan 1906.

Keir Hardie setting up the guillotine in Palace Yard.²⁶ The Executive of the Labour Party told the annual conference held within a month of the election:

One thing is already clear. A new party which can place its candidate at the head of the poll in the historic constituency of Newcastle-on-Tyne, with one of the highest votes in the whole country; a party which can win seats in Bradford and Glasgow, in Dundee and London, against the nominees of both Liberals and Tories, has a future before it, it will have a hand in the making of history.²⁷

Yet the executive was not laying the whole truth before the conference, for only thirty-one of the fifty LRC candidates had faced Liberal opposition, and twenty-four of the twenty-nine successful Labour candidates owed their victories to the absence of Liberal opposition. MacDonald had negotiated an electoral pact with Herbert Gladstone, the Liberal Chief Whip, in 1903.²⁸ Further to this, the historian of the 1906 general election has noted the way in which both the LRC's manifesto and its candidates' election addresses 'followed Liberal policies', and that the candidates' language was reminiscent of Liberalism, with Hardie writing of the creation of 'an era of freedom, fraternity ... equality ... [and] national righteousness'.²⁹ Indeed during the secret electoral negotiations between MacDonald and the Liberal Party, Jesse Herbert reported MacDonald telling him that 'the candidates of the L.R.C. will be found in almost every instance earnest Liberals, who will support a Liberal Government.' After the election, Herbert wrote to Gladstone that the new Labour MPs were 'strongly favourable to the Government. There are not more than seven irreconcilable. Even they are friendly with me.'³⁰ In the election of 1906, this meant that seventy-nine per cent of LRC candidates mentioned Free Trade, Home Rule and reform of the Education Act, and seventy-five per cent mentioned Licensing Act reform. These were the four most popular issues in the Liberal pantheon. Ahead of them in Labour election addresses came increased working class representation, Taff Vale, unemployment and old age pensions. Of these 'labour' issues, only increased labour representation did not find a place in Liberal election addresses.³¹

As a minority party, Labour certainly could not set the agenda for the election, but there was also an element of the fact that most Labour candidates were happy to

26 17 Jan 1906, in A.K. Russell, The Liberal Landslide, p.155.

27 Labour Party, Conference Report, 1906, p.3.

28 See Frank Bealey and Henry Pelling, Labour and Politics 1900-1906 A History of the Labour Representation Committee, Macmillan, 1958, chapters 6 and 9.

29 Russell, The Liberal Landslide, pp.78, 79.

30 Frank Bealey, 'Negotiations between the Liberal Party and Labour Representation Committee before the General Election of 1906,' Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research, 29, 1956, pp.264, 274. The seven irreconcilables were presumably those nominated by the ILP and SDF, including MacDonald.

31 Russell, The Liberal Landslide, pp.65, 79.

follow the Liberals. In a survey of the successful Labour MPs' reading, it was revealed that the books cited as most influential were the Bible and those by Ruskin and Carlyle. Only two cited Marx, three Blatchford, three William Morris and five Sidney Webb. In all, only eight Labour MPs cited socialist books as being influential to them (and two of these, W.C. Steadman and James Haslam, were Lib-Lab MPs), despite eighteen probably considering themselves socialists.³² The Parliamentary Labour Party of 1906 were therefore not revolutionaries; they believed that social change could come through the existing institutions of society. How, then, would they act within the House of Commons?

Keir Hardie, in 1898, laid out a political strategy:

I admit freely [he wrote] that agitation from the floor of the House of Commons is the most effective, and from this it follows we ought to aim at getting men in. But they must go there as agitators - rude, wild, unkempt agitators, if you will. Of smooth, smug, respectable politicians there are already enough and to spare.³³

Faced with the existence of a sizable Labour Party in Parliament, the Labour Leader rejected such an approach, on the grounds that the British public would not take kindly to 'sheerly destructive parliamentary tactics', though it also warned against 'simple endorsement of the Government's policy'.³⁴ Given the view of the state/parliament held by most of the Labour MPs and leaders it was already determined how the PLP would act. Its behaviour would reflect the acceptance of traditional political behaviour in the Commons. The LRC's manifesto for the 1906 election had stated that 'the House of Commons is supposed to be the people's House, and yet the people are not there.'³⁵ With the election of thirty Labour MPs, the logic was that the discrepancy was being remedied. Stephen Yeo has argued that there are four main reasons why Labour could hold this view. First, that in England the state is very old. Second, that its development has been that of 'the great arch', that is there has been no sudden break in its development. Third, British socialists largely accepted a division between 'private' capitalism and the 'public' state. Fourth, the very age of the state has been a powerful pressure preventing the previous three propositions becoming apparent.³⁶ Henry (later Lord) Snell, in trying to empathise with MacDonald's feelings upon entering the Commons, described his own, and

32 W.T. Stead, 'The Labour Party and the Books that Helped to Make It,' Review of Reviews, vol. XXXIII, June 1906, pp.568-582.

33 Labour Leader, 8 Oct 1898, in Emrys Hughes (ed.), Keir Hardie's Speeches and Writings (From 1888 to 1915), Forward, Glasgow, n.d., p.96.

34 Labour Leader, 9 Feb 1906.

35 Bealey and Pelling, Labour and Politics, p.264.

36 Yeo, 'Socialism, the State, and Some Oppositional Englishness,' p.314.

provides evidence for Yeo's arguments:

I have elsewhere endeavoured to describe the emotions of a thoughtful man on the day when, for the first time, he becomes a member of the British Parliament, and the thrill that he feels when he makes his first appearance at its doors.... If the new member is a normally healthy human being, possessing some knowledge of the history of his country and the place of Parliament in its wonderful story, he will probably regard this as the greatest day of his life.... If our new member is not moved to emotion as he enters upon his great heritage, or if he remains unaware of his partnership in the great fellowship of service which the House of Commons represents, his life there may be useful but it can scarcely be happy.³⁷

Feelings of this sort had more in common with Bagehot's description of the parts of the constitution 'which excite and preserve the reverence of the population - the *dignified* parts,' than with Hardie's view that Labour MPs 'were not in Parliament as gentlemen of easy means, using the House of Commons as the first club in Europe.'³⁸

Thus Labour parliamentarians drew together state, parliament and English history into one indivisible unit. For MacDonald, 'religion, national experience, economic and industrial evolution, have given the State a personality which impinges on the individual will and modifies its direction and motives.'³⁹ The Labour Party was therefore ruled by a perception of English history which it could not betray. Hardie's strategy of Labour MPs becoming 'rude, wild, unkempt agitators' had to be rejected. MacDonald was clear that such tactics should be rejected. He warned those who would have acted as Hardie once advised:

I have little sympathy with those who sigh for the day when the Labour members are carried out by the Sergeant-at-Arms, or when they defy the rules of the House to 'get something done'. Parliament is Parliament, and whoever goes there in a spirit otherwise than Parliamentary had better not go there at all.⁴⁰

Justice had also made a warning, though from the opposite direction. The House of Commons's

effect upon newcomers is very insidious and very curious to watch.... The working class members who enter the House of Commons [it referred to Lib-Lab MPs] become highly respectable, prosperous, and somewhat self-conscious bourgeois. Their dress, their appearance, their manners, and, unfortunately, their politics accommodate themselves to their new surroundings very rapidly. They would not

37 Zygmunt Bauman, Between Class and Elite: The Evolution of the British Labour Movement, A Sociological Study, Manchester UP, Manchester, 1972, p.208n.

38 Walter Bagehot, The English Constitution, Fontana/Collins, Glasgow, 1963, p.61; The Times, 14 Feb 1906.

39 MacDonald, Socialism and Government I, p.5.

40 Labour Leader, 10 Aug 1906.

think of outraging the most obsolete and ridiculous of the 'forms of the House' for any consideration whatever.

Justice asked whether the new Labour MPs would be able to resist this effect, concluding that some would, but some would not.⁴¹ Justice had seen the pressures as wholly external, whereas many of the new MPs carried with them the internal pressures of their own beliefs. It was not very long before Hyndman came to view the Labour MPs as 'the Dependent Labour Party'. He recounts a meeting with 'a very old friend' who had been a Member of Parliament for some time:

'These new Labour men are of no earthly use to you, Hyndman.' 'No?' I replied. 'What's the matter with them?' 'Oh, they are of no account from your point of view. We have got them already. They are worse than the old lot you used to attack so bitterly. They pretend to be independent, but they are not so a bit in reality. You will see that when it comes to the test. We can rely upon them to vote with the Government to a man. They have tremendous regard for forms and ceremonies, and already seem to know more about the Speaker's ruling than I do, and to have much more fear of breaking in upon order. Besides, they are so dreadfully deferential - it makes me sick.'⁴²

These criticisms were not merely made by the left outside the Labour Party. Philip Snowden, elected in 1906, also commented upon his fellow MPs:

A number of the Trade Union members had shocked their colleagues by appearing in what in those days was regarded as the head gear of conventionality, namely a silk hat. One well-known Liberal, who had previously worn a silk hat, put on a soft hat, and when reproached for this exclaimed that he did not want to be taken for a Labour member!....

The Labour members quickly adapted themselves to the customs of the House of Commons. There was a practice in those days that when a member left the Chamber he stopped at the Bar and made a profound obeisance to the Speaker. It was rather amusing to see the Labour members, whose advent to Parliament was expected to outrage all the conventionalities, performing this custom with more correctness than the Tory members.⁴³

C.F.G. Masterman, a Liberal, noted that there were 'no wild revolutionaries, harbingers of the uprising of the lower orders' in the PLP, but only 'a mixture of old-fashioned Trade Unionists with a sprinkling of well behaved and pleasant Socialists'.⁴⁴

41 Justice, 17 Feb 1906. W.L. Guttsman, The British Political Elite, MacGibbon and Kee, 1968, p.247, has argued that before 1914 the politics, class and income of Labour MPs largely kept them out of 'Society', but that after 1918 there was 'a growing integration of the Labour benches into the life of the House of Commons and eventually in the wider "Society".' Nevertheless before the war the left had already become concerned.

42 H.M. Hyndman, Further Reminiscences, Macmillan, 1912, p.275.

43 Philip Viscount Snowden, An Autobiography Volume One 1864-1919, Ivor Nicolson and Watson, 1934, pp.124-125, 133.

44 Nation, 24 Aug 1907, in Morris, Edwardian Radicalism, p.3.

It was in such a context that the parliamentary behaviour of Victor Grayson, the Socialist and Labour MP for Colne Valley, caused such resentment within the PLP. Interrupting debate on the Licensing Bill on 15 October 1908, Grayson demanded that the House deal with the problem of unemployment. He was asked to leave the House, and received no support from the Labour MPs. As he left, it was on them he turned, declaring, 'I leave the House with pleasure. You are traitors to your class. You will not stand up for your class. You traitors.' Two days later, he again interrupted proceedings, this time calling the Commons 'a House of Murderers'.⁴⁵ One biographer of Grayson states that the ILP and trade union MPs of the PLP then formed a common front against Grayson, with Snowden even alleging that Grayson had spent his quarterly payment from the ILP on a single sumptuous dinner that had been the talk of Westminster. There was no proof presented. It was simple character assassination, the effects of which could be expected to be profound in a Nonconformist and puritan party like the Labour Party.⁴⁶

The PLP soon came to see its role as foremost defenders of the 'democratic' House of Commons. MacDonald stated it clearly:

To reform the House of Commons is good, to degrade in the imagination of the people even a bad House of Commons is a crime - a most heinous crime for Socialists.... The Socialist more than any other citizen should preserve that respect for the political institutions of Democracy which alone makes the decrees of these institutions acceptable to the people.

He further argued that the Labour Party could not act as obstructionists as the Irish Party had previously done, for

the Irish Party acts upon the assumption that it is an alien Parliament; ... the [Irish] Party is no outgrowth from our own development, no new uprising from the breast of our own people; it does not present to us, nor does it consider for itself, the problem of historical continuity, for it is in arms against history. But that is not a description of the Labour Party. It desires to gain possession of what the Irish Party desires to be rid of.... What it would destroy, were it to injure Parliament, would not be an alien power but its own heritage.⁴⁷

Hence for MacDonald the House of Commons stood supreme above all other considerations, to be defended from its attackers, whether the aristocratic House of Lords or the left wing of the labour movement. While the latter attack was ongoing and would increase in intensity during the industrial unrest of 1910 to 1914, the

45 House of Commons, *Parliamentary Debates*, 4th Series, vol. 191, cols. 495-497, 631-634.

46 David Clark, *Victor Grayson: Labour's Lost Leader*, Quartet, 1985, pp.57, 60. The more political responses to Grayson and the sentiment on the left that he expressed are dealt with later in this chapter.

47 MacDonald, *Socialism and Government I*, pp. xxv, xxvi-xxvii.

rejection of Lloyd George's Budget in November 1909 represented to the Labour Party an attack on the the progressive history of Britain. 'For three hundred and fifty years,' explained the Labour Leader, 'the House of Commons had been encroaching steadily upon the prerogatives of the Peers ... with one swoop, all this progress has been swept back.'⁴⁸ British socialists had always seen one of their main tasks as the defeat of landlords, and the Labour Party, seeing the House of Lords as the strongest bastion of landlordism entered the fray against them. 'The battle against the Lords,' Hardie told the 1910 Labour conference, 'is peculiarly ours.'⁴⁹ The Labour Party manifesto for the January 1910 election followed the agenda set by the Liberals; it told the electorate that 'the great question you are to decide is whether THE PEERS OR THE PEOPLE are to rule this country!'⁵⁰ W.C. Anderson explained why the question was so important:

Cold and gloomy January will be a memorable month for all who in storm and shower have stood by the torn but flying flag of freedom. We shall witness a struggle destined to flash one more gleam across the skies of our English liberties. In this conflict the Labour Party will play a high and noble part.... The democracy of these islands have an account, long overdue, against the peers.... Their lordships were ill-advised to tamper with the Constitution ... a rash and revolutionary act which is a contemptuous defiance of the House of Commons and of democracy.

This call to arms to Labour supporters was despite Anderson's confession that 'the constitution is only venerable and valuable so long as it keeps the poor in subjection,' but it was worth defending, he argued, because others had done so; 'Pym had pleaded for it, Hampden had laid down his life for it, Cromwell had drawn sword for it on many a hard-fought field.' Thus the general election of January 1910 was seen as a re-run of the English Civil War, with the Labour Party playing a major role in the defence of popular English liberties.⁵¹ Labour did not play an independent role in the January 1910 election. Neal Blewett has argued that 'in so far as Labour conducted a national campaign it was as part of the Radical wing of the Liberal Party. Labour speeches differed little in tone from Radical ones; the majority of Labour candidates were little more than surrogates for Radicals.'⁵² But while the Labour Party appeared radical in regard to its call for abolition of the House of Lords, it aimed its appeals at conservatism. Anderson called the Lords 'rash and revolutionary', while Labour fought in defence of a Whig interpretation of history

48 Labour Leader, 3 Dec 1909.

49 Neal Blewett, The Peers, the Parties and the People: The General Elections of 1910, Macmillan, London and Basingstoke, 1972, p.236.

50 Labour Leader, 10 Dec 1909.

51 William C. Anderson, Hang Out Our Banners, National Labour Press, Manchester, 1909 (Two-page election leaflet).

52 Blewett, Peers, Parties and People, p.109.

and the British constitution.

Such ideas were held, not because of the particular leadership of the Labour Party, but because of the very nature of the ideas and strategy accepted by the Party. Through the rejection of class division as the major division within society, Labour accepted the unitary nature of the nation, seeing one national history of which they were part, with the House of Commons forming the core of this national history. Within these ideas they concluded that their role included an essential element of defending English liberty and democracy. Since Labour accepted this history, and since Labour, as Hardie explained, 'aimed at becoming a great political power in the land ... it must conform as nearly as possible to the political institutions already in existence with which the public mind is familiar.'⁵³ It was for such reasons that 'of all the political parties claiming socialism to be their aim, the Labour Party has always been the most dogmatic - not about socialism, but about the parliamentary system.'⁵⁴

Those Without Respect: Critics of the Parliamentary Labour Party

The Labour Party in Parliament achieved a few initial successes, such as the reversal of the Taff Vale decision and some government action on school meals, workmen's compensation and unemployment; even the SDF were not at first highly critical of the Labour Party. But disappointment among Labour's supporters soon set in, because of Labour's inability to pressurise the Liberal Government with its huge majority, and the resulting poor by-election results. Between 1906 and 1908, Labour fought ten by-elections, winning only Jarrow and coming bottom of the poll on five occasions. In 1909 the Labour Party won Sheffield Attercliffe, and, in the 1910 elections, increased its representation in the Commons to forty in January and forty-two in December. But this rise was due to the affiliation of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain to the Labour Party rather than an increase in popularity. In all the fourteen by-elections Labour fought between 1911 and 1914, as a result of pressure from the left rather than as a strategy of the leadership, it found itself at the bottom of the poll.⁵⁵

There were two phases of opposition to the Labour Party's political strategy. The first phase (1907-1910) was dominated by the left of the ILP, with the SDF and

53 Labour Leader, 23 March 1901, in Yeo, 'Socialism, the State and Some Oppositional Englishness,' p.324.

54 Miliband, Parliamentary Socialism, p.13.

55 Roger Moore, The Emergence of the Labour Party 1880-1924, Hodder and Stoughton, 1978, pp.108-109; Blewett, The Peers, the Parties and the People, pp.381, 387, 389. See also Roy Douglas, 'Labour in Decline 1910-14,' in Kenneth D. Brown, Essays in Anti-Labour History, Macmillan, London and Basingstoke, 1974, pp.105-125.

Clarion groups offering support. The second phase (1910 onwards) was centred around the industrial unrest and syndicalist theory of social change. The opposition of the first phase continued after 1910, but it too found itself the target of syndicalist criticism, and in response found itself aligning itself closer to the Labour Party, and even joining the attack against the syndicalists. This second phase presented great dangers for the Labour Party, for not only did the syndicalists offer a completely alternative strategy, but the Liberal government relied upon the support of the Labour and Irish parties for survival. Far from placing Labour in a position of strength, this led to weakness, for the Labour leadership did not want to bring down the government and hence had their sphere of movement severely restricted. Therefore, Labour's ideologues conducted a sustained propaganda attack upon extra-parliamentary activity.

Let Us Reform the Labour Party

In his 1907 New Year's greeting to the ILP, Hardie announced that 'the party in the House of Commons has more than come up to expectations.' The simple proof was that it had thirty elected MPs, hence 'the I.L.P. has succeeded where its critics have failed.'⁵⁶ This was a reference to the SDF whose only MP, Will Thorne, had been elected under the auspices of the LRC. But, within months, criticism was coming from inside the ILP. T.D. Benson protested against the idea that the ILP existed solely for putting men into Parliament. 'A Hardie, or MacDonald, or Snowden, agitating or speaking in the country regularly is, in my opinion,' he wrote, 'worth a dozen Labour members in the House.'⁵⁷ H. Russell Smart agreed, arguing that 'it is not statesmen we want in Parliament at present, but agitators, who will use Parliament as a platform.'⁵⁸ MacDonald rejected such notions; he particularly saw himself as the skilled parliamentarian. 'Governments are not afraid of Socialist speeches,' he confidently asserted; 'they are very much afraid of successful criticisms in detail.' With an air of superiority brought by his position he added that his critics could not know what went on in Parliament.⁵⁹ Smart replied simply that if he could not know what was going on in the Commons, then how much more

56 Labour Leader, 4 Jan 1907.

57 Labour Leader, 19 April 1907.

58 Labour Leader, 17 May 1907.

59 Labour Leader, 10 May 1907. See also 24 May 1907. Radical MPs in the nineteenth century had criticised the shortage of public seats in the Commons which 'excluded those whom it professed to represent'. MacDonald felt that if critics sat in the strangers' gallery they would appreciate the work of the parliamentary socialist more. He did not mention the difficulties of this, but suggested a daily labour paper would serve the same purpose. Roland Quinault, 'Westminster and the Victorian Constitution,' Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, 6th series, vol. II, 1992, p.96; Labour Leader, 10 May 1907.

ignorant were the public.⁶⁰ This feeling of superiority was not confined to MacDonald alone, nor the British Labour Party, for, as Robert Michels observed of the European socialist parties, 'in view of their greater competence in various questions, the socialist parliamentary groups consider themselves superior even to the congresses, which are the supreme courts of the party, and they claim effective autonomy.'⁶¹ At the 1907 Labour conference, the leadership had secured a resolution on the relationship of conference to parliamentary party that declared that

resolutions instructing the Parliamentary Party as to their action in the House of Commons be taken as the opinions of the Conference, on the understanding that the time and method of giving effect to those instructions be left to the Party in the House, in conjunction with the National Executive.⁶²

Hardie, at the same conference, had declared that 'if the motion ... was intended to limit the action of the Party in the House of Commons, he should have seriously to consider whether he could remain a member of the Parliamentary Party.'⁶³ This attitude of the parliamentary leadership, partly resulted from the belief that, since Parliament was, they held, sovereign over the nation, so the parliamentary party should be sovereign over the party.

Despite Labour Leader's announcement in June 1907 that the controversy had blown over,⁶⁴ the election of Victor Grayson in July was to provide a focus for the left's frustration. At the celebration meeting for himself and Pete Curran (elected for Jarrow), Grayson argued that 'what was needed was that people should go to the House realising that in its stupendous mountain of tradition there was something so alien to real reform that it would take revolutionary and unconstitutional means to break it.'⁶⁵ It was in this light that he saw his outburst over the plight of the unemployed, because while he wanted the House of Commons, 'a worn out and antiquated machine ... scrapped and replaced by something more in consonance with the desires of a new era', his strategy for achieving this was 'a strong Socialist party in the House of Commons'.⁶⁶ Grayson saw the role of this party as much like that of the Irish party, a role MacDonald rejected.⁶⁷ The conflict came to a head at the 1909

60 Labour Leader, 31 May 1907.

61 Robert Michels, Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy, trans. by Eden and Cedar Paul, Free Press, New York, 1962, p.157.

62 Miliband, Parliamentary Socialism, pp.26-27.

63 Moore, The Emergence of Labour, p.104. For later views on the sovereignty of the Labour conference see Snowden, Autobiography Volume One, pp.87-88 and R.H.S. Crossman's introduction to Bagehot, The English Constitution, pp.42-43.

64 Labour Leader, 14 June 1907.

65 Labour Leader, 9 Aug 1907.

66 Victor Grayson, The Appeal for Socialism, People's Press, Stockport, n.d. 1908, pp.13, 9.

67 The Irish Party was seen as an example of independence and discipline, but its obstructionist methods were rejected by Labour. See p.101 above.

ILP conference.⁶⁸ The National Administrative Council (NAC) won the main votes. It was decided that an MP who refused to sign the Labour Party constitution, as Grayson had done, could not receive a salary from the ILP. But the conference referred back a section of the NAC report censuring Grayson for refusing to share a platform with Hardie at Holborn. The 'Big Four' of the NAC, MacDonald, Hardie, Snowden and Glasier then resigned. This move strengthened the dominance of the 'Big Four', for, as Michels observed, 'resignation of office, in so far as it is not a mere expression of discouragement or protest ... is in most cases a means for the retention and fortification of leadership.... the opponent is forced to exhibit in return an even greater deference, and this above all when the leader who makes use of the method is really indispensable, or is considered indispensable by the mass.'⁶⁹ The strength of the Labour Party meant that the 'Big Four' could retreat into positions of strength. They also had full access to the ILP and other publishing facilities.

Their counter-offensive took two forms. First, they defended constitutionalism. Hardie argued that the earlier anti-parliamentarism of the movement had meant that 'Socialism, in those days, was treated as a plant of continental growth which could never find lodgement in Great Britain.' To circumvent this the ILP had been formed; its parliamentarism meant that 'a Labour party is accepted as part of our political system equally with the Liberal and Tory parties. That of itself is a gain of no mean order.' Even the continental parties had left their revolutionary 'childhood' and entered a stage of 'responsible manhood'. He implied that 'British Socialism' led the way.⁷⁰ Another supporter of the leadership continued the argument along these lines, defending the fact that 'the Labour Party is not a Socialist Party' as peculiarly British.

It is [he argued] avowedly an alliance of Trade Unionists and Socialists - a working-class alliance - bound together, working together, marching together towards a goal, but tentatively accepting modern political institutions and the traditional conservatism of the British temperament.... The British Labour Party ... is the product of a quarter of a century's strenuous unparalleled propaganda; it marks the dawn of a new era; it is not the acorn, it is the oak; its roots are deep down in the nurtured soil of British character.⁷¹

The supporters of the Labour Party had extended the charge of un-Englishness to include not only those who advocated revolutionary change, but also those

68 Many of Grayson's supporters had expected the battle sooner, but Grayson failed to speak at the Labour Party conference held in January. See Clark, Victor Grayson: Labour's Lost Leader, p.61.

69 Michels, Political Parties, p.81.

70 J. Keir Hardie, My Confession of Faith in the Labour Alliance, ILP, n.d. 1909, pp.1, 2, 11. MacDonald's Socialism and Government was ammunition in the same battle.

71 T. Gavan Duffy, The Labour Party in Parliament - What It Is: What It Does: What It Wants, National Labour Press, Manchester, n.d. 1910?, pp.2-4.

reformists who disagreed with the 'labour alliance'. But this was only one side of the counter-offensive. Supporters of the 'labour alliance' also sought to out-manoeuvre opponents to their left. They argued that they were the true followers of Karl Marx, the father of modern scientific socialism. Basing themselves upon a passage from the Communist Manifesto, that declared that 'the Communists do not form a separate party opposed to the working-class parties.' The 'Big Four' argued that 'the ILP was formed by Socialists, who desired to follow the Marxian policy of uniting the working class into an independent party.'⁷² Hardie became the most enthusiastic user of this line. He declared that 'the Labour Party is the only expression of orthodox Marxian Socialism in Great Britain,' and that 'the founders of the I.L.P., and even more so, of the Labour Party were ... in the direct line of apostolic succession from Marx.'⁷³ He wrote a series of three articles on Marx in 1910.⁷⁴ But he was not alone; even MacDonald wrote that the policy of the ILP had been to 'unite for political purposes with industrial organisations of the workers.... This policy is, indeed, but the carrying out of what Marx advised.'⁷⁵ This twin attack, that the Labour Party was not only Marxist but 'the only political form which evolutionary socialism can take in a country with the political traditions and methods of Great Britain'⁷⁶ gave the left little room to move, particularly since their actual strategy differed little from the Labour Party's.

Logie Barrow has argued that the breakaway of left ILP branches to join with the SDF and Clarion groups in the British Socialist Party was a split between those who favoured the 'educationalistic' method against the 'legislativistic'.⁷⁷ However, whether these socialists were awaiting the inevitable breakdown of capitalism, like the SDP,⁷⁸ or wished to 'make Socialists', like the Clarionettes, they both wished to rely on parliamentary methods as their main propaganda weapon. The SDP rejected the economic struggle to concentrate on the political struggle, and this meant that their activity was confined to municipal councils and parliament (the latter unsuccessfully). A manifesto of the executive council of the SDP on 'The Paralysis of Parliament' claimed that 'capitalist parliamentarism, like landlord parliamentarism before it, has been tried and found wanting in the land of its birth,' but saw direct action, 'by general strike or otherwise' as impossible. It concluded that 'as matters

72 Labour Leader, 16 April 1909. An open letter explaining their resignations.

73 Hardie, The Labour Alliance, pp.13, 14.

74 Labour Leader, 12, 19, and 26 Aug 1910.

75 MacDonald, The Socialist Movement, p.234.

76 Socialist Movement, p.235.

77 'Determinism and Environmentalism in Socialist Thought,' in Raphael Samuel and Gareth Stedman Jones (eds.), Culture, Ideology and Politics, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982, pp.194-214.

78 The Social-Democratic Federation re-named itself the Social-Democratic Party in 1907.

stand in Great Britain ... political methods are still indispensable if any peaceful revolution is to be brought about.' Since its proposed alternative of a constituent assembly was still-born, it found itself fighting another general election in December 1910.⁷⁹ Blatchford, who had rejected violence as un-English and favoured education of the people in socialism, admitted that he did not

mean that no advance towards Socialism can be made until the masses are intellectually and morally elevated to the due pitch for it. Let social legislation go on apace. Let us get all the Socialism we can by instalments. The best social educator is Socialism.⁸⁰

Thus he too had to accept parliamentary socialism. The left ILP, who found expression in a pamphlet written by four members of the ILP NAC, warned that the impotence of the PLP presented 'the danger ... that many have not only lost confidence in their politicians but are fast losing *all* faith or interest in Parliamentary politics.'⁸¹

The Industrial Unrest and Syndicalism

The years after 1910 saw an explosion of industrial unrest. In 1907 2.15 million working days were lost due to industrial action, in 1910 9.87 million, in 1911 10.16 million, in 1912, due to the national miners' strike, 40.89 million, in 1913 9.8 million, and in 1914 9.88 million.⁸² The years between 1900 and 1912 saw a ten per cent fall in average real wages,⁸³ a fall that the presence of the Labour Party in the Commons had been unable to prevent. The rejection of ideas of class politics by the Labour leaders had its corollary in the actions of the trade union bureaucrats. In 1896 an act of parliament had offered conciliation facilities to employers and union negotiators. After 1900, when George Asquith became the Board of Trade's 'troubleshooter', these facilities were expanded, and union officials were appointed as 'Labour Correspondents', sending information to a central statistical office.⁸⁴ The unrest of 1910 to 1914 was very much due to pressure from below in reaction against the union leaderships.

79 Justice, 19 March 1910.

80 Laurence Thompson, Robert Blatchford: Portrait of an Englishman, Victor Gollancz, 1951, pp.133-134.

81 Leonard Hall, J.M. McLachlan, C.T. Douthwaite and J.H. Belcher, Let Us Reform the Labour Party, Fellowship Press, Manchester, n.d., p.1.

82 Donald Read, 'Introduction: Crisis or Golden Age?' in Read (ed.), Edwardian England, p.16.

83 Bob Holton, British Syndicalism 1900-1914 Myths and Realities, Pluto, 1976, p.28. Snowden estimated the fall at 13 per cent, Colin Cross, Philip Snowden, Barrie and Rockliff, 1966, p.119.

84 Holton, British Syndicalism, p.33.

The existing political organisations claiming to represent the working class, through acceptance of Parliament as the proper forum for politics, were not well-placed to benefit from the industrial action. Glasier had called strikes 'irrational and futile'. Snowden wrote that 'by defending the right to strike, [socialists] are repudiating every principle of their creed. Just as it is criminal to encourage war, so it is folly to rely on strikes as a regular means of trying to advance labour interests.'⁸⁵ MacDonald, while admitting that 'the fundamental cause of labour unrest is low wages,' argued that the Labour Party would not necessarily take labour's side:

We cannot possibly allow capital and labour simply to fight out their own battles, we, standing on one side, looking on. We are too fond of imagining there are two sides only to a dispute. There are three sides to every dispute; there is the side of capital, there is the side of labour, and there is the side of the general community; and the general community has no business to allow capital and labour, fighting their battles themselves, to elbow them out of consideration. We are bound to take upon ourselves our responsibility; and, if capital is wrong, we must enforce right upon it. At the same time, and I do not hesitate to say, if labour is wrong, then we must do the same.⁸⁶

Arthur Henderson, Will Crooks, George Barnes and a Lib-Lab MP, Charles Fenwick actually tabled a bill aiming to make strikes illegal unless thirty days' notice was given, and including a clause making anyone who 'incites, encourages or aids' a strike liable to a fine of between £10 and £200.⁸⁷

There were no other sizable left-wing groups ideologically equipped to deal with strikes. The Fabian Society executive had written to the press before the threatened rail strike of 1907 that 'in the case of the nation's principal means of land transport, resort to the characteristic trade-union weapon of the strike is ... a national calamity.... The nation can no more afford to let the railway industry be interrupted by the claims - however just - of the railway workers than by the obstinacy - however dignified - of the railway directors.'⁸⁸ The Clarion said that 'Socialistic teaching has consistently pointed out the futility of the strike, and advocated the better way of arbitration.'⁸⁹ The attitude of the 'revolutionary' SDP was strikingly similar to that of the mainstream left. Hyndman wrote that 'we of the Social Democratic Party and Justice are opposed to strikes on principle.'⁹⁰

85 Glasier, On Strikes, p.1; Cross, Philip Snowden, p.119.

86 HC Debates, 5:84, 46, 53. 15 Feb 1912.

87 Chris Wrigley, Arthur Henderson, GPC Books, Cardiff, 1990, p.45.

88 Niles Carpenter, Guild Socialism: An Historical and Critical Analysis, D. Appleton, New York and London, 1922, pp.63-64.

89 Clarion, 16 Sept 1910. In 1909 the Clarion had published a pamphlet called Stop the Strike.

90 Justice, 10 Aug 1907, in Walter Kendall, The Revolutionary Movement in Britain 1900-21 The Origins of British Communism, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969, p.28.

Syndicalists positively encouraged strike action, seeing it as not only a method for improving workers' living standards but also as the vehicle of social transformation. While the syndicalists may not have initiated strikes themselves in most instances, they certainly fitted the mood of the time, and increased their influence in the working class at the expense of both the ILP/Labour Party and British Socialist Party, as the fused ILP left, Clarion groups and SDP became in 1912.⁹¹ These groups played down the influence of syndicalism, while at the same time conducting a campaign declaring it to be un-English. MacDonald judged that 'Syndicalism in England is negligible,' and Justice that 'as a matter of fact, there is practically no Syndicalism in this country'.⁹² The SDF 'old guard' were concerned at the influence of syndicalist ideas in the BSP. The executive announced in 1912 that 'political action is the principle function of the party ... Syndicalism is avowedly opposed to Socialism. There is no probability that Syndicalist methods will find favour in Great Britain.'⁹³ The threat to the BSP's political policy had to be taken seriously. Organisers of the new BSP in Birmingham were promoting a strategy of 'general and combined strikes of the exploited, developing towards the final Lock-out by the nation of its exploiters,' and only secondly 'militant Socialists in parliament'.⁹⁴ Labour and social-democrats, supposedly disparate groups, agreed upon another point, that syndicalism was foreign and could not take root in the political soil of Britain. They seemed little concerned that they had once had to argue against such accusations about socialism.⁹⁵ The first point of attack was that the word 'syndicalism' was 'a word imported from France'.⁹⁶ MacDonald expanded this point:

It is in vain that one searches in English dictionaries for the word Syndicalism. It is a French stranger in our language, with no registered abode as yet. Had it not been an ugly word it would probably never have been brought over, for it has achieved fame by reason of its capacity to frighten.⁹⁷

A.S. Headingley offered some advice in Justice, 'I do not see what Syndicalism has to do on these shores,' he wrote, 'and think the English language is rich enough to

91 For the relationship between the syndicalists and the industrial unrest see Holton, British Syndicalism, pp.76-77, and Joseph White, Tom Mann, Manchester UP, Manchester, 1991, pp.156-158.

92 J. Ramsay MacDonald, Syndicalism: A Critical Examination, Constable, 1912, p.39; Justice, 23 March 1912.

93 Justice, 2 Nov 1912.

94 Manifesto of the Birmingham Section of the British Socialist Party, 1911, BSP Collection, Archives Collection Miscellaneous 155, folio 59, BLPES.

95 Even in 1912, Justice was advertising a forthcoming series of articles, 'Pioneers of the Class Struggle' by Theodore Rothstein, which would show 'the British origin of the class war idea, which some of our "evolutionary" friends imagine to have been imported from Germany by Karl Marx', Justice, 17 Aug 1912.

96 Labour Leader, 5 April 1912.

97 MacDonald, Syndicalism, p.v.

give an English word to represent an English movement.⁹⁸ But this advice suggested that syndicalism, if only a foreign word were not used, would be acceptable to the British way of life. Yet Headingley not only called syndicalism French, he suggested it would be wise to 'be quite sure that this term does not cover a Jesuit and capitalist intrigue'. And the headline to his article summarised his position: 'Syndicalism - Indigenous to France, Inappropriate to England.'⁹⁹ The Labour Leader did not think it necessary to go beyond saying that syndicalism was 'the latest blessing (?) imported in an unadulterated condition from France and presented for British consumption as a hotchpotch of the Mediæval Trades' Guilds' systems, modern Trades Unionism, Anarchism and Socialism.'¹⁰⁰ MacDonald too was satisfied that syndicalism was 'British realism captured by French idealism'.¹⁰¹

Political socialists also knew that they could rely on a further line of defence against syndicalism, for as the miners' MP, William Brace, told the Commons,

if any hon. Member ... is under the impression that Syndicalism is likely to gain a foothold amongst the miners in particular and the workers in general, he is not paying much of a compliment to the innate common sense of the British working man.¹⁰²

MacDonald was inclined to agree with this point generally; he argued that

there is ... a real unity called a nation, which endows the individual with traditions, with habits, with a system of social conduct. The Syndicalist ... - being one who lays down that this national inheritance is unreal, is nothing - can build up no policy upon it.

However, the evidence of the Unofficial Reform Committee, the election of two well-known syndicalists to the South Wales Miners' Federation executive, and the influence of the syndicalist pamphlet The Miners' Next Step in South Wales, led MacDonald to explain that in South Wales 'racial temperament and economic hardship offered special promise for the Syndicalist propaganda.'¹⁰³ Clearly, the real national unity did not extend to all Britons. When it suited, the force of Englishness could be proved only against its exceptions.

The response of syndicalists to accusations of un-Englishness was largely indifference. They were proud of their international connections. Tom Mann noted

98 Justice, 16 March 1912.

99 Justice, 16 March 1912. If the headline was the work of the editor or sub-editor, the point is reinforced. See also Justice, 27 April 1912, which called syndicalism 'entirely foreign to this country.'

100 Labour Leader, 17 May 1912.

101 MacDonald, Syndicalism, p.1.

102 HC Debates, 5:85, 2121, 21 March 1912.

103 MacDonald, Syndicalism, pp.55, 43. For syndicalism in South Wales see Holton, British Syndicalism, chapters 5 and 7.

with admiration that French syndicalists 'are, for the most part, anti-patriotic and anti-militarist, e.g., they declare that the workers have no country'.¹⁰⁴ On returning from Australia to Britain in 1910 he went with Guy Bowman to France to learn from French syndicalist experiences. Upon returning he advised on 'a policy to adopt':

Now, without urging a close imitation of the French, or any other method I strongly believe that, on the average, the French policy is one that will suit us best; for whilst the temperament of the French is undoubtedly different from that of the British, their interests are exactly as ours, and their enemy is also ours - the Capitalist system.¹⁰⁵

E.J.B. Allen, who had formed the Industrial League in 1908 to promote industrial unionism and was later a member of Mann's Industrial Syndicalist Education League, answered the question 'Is Socialism Un-English?'

Syndicalism is a natural product, peculiar to no nationality.... Even the British worker can understand the meaning of the phrase: 'The product to the producer, the tools to those that use them.'¹⁰⁶

Syndicalists saw class as the fundamental division within society, hence unity between workers in different countries was more important than worrying about the use of un-English words. As Mann told a conference on industrial syndicalism in Manchester in November 1910, 'we must remember we are Europeans ... We want a universal term - Syndicalism.'¹⁰⁷ Syndicalists also asserted that in common struggle divisions between workers would be broken down. Fred Bower, a syndicalist stonemason, described how Protestant and Catholic workers overcame their differences during the Liverpool transport strike in 1911:

From Orange Garston, Everton and Toxteth Park, from Roman Catholic Bootle and the Scotland Road area, they came. Forgotten were their religious feuds.... The Garston band had walked five miles and their drum-major proudly whirled his sceptre twined with orange and green ribbons as he led his contingent band, half out of the Roman Catholic, half out of the local Orange band.¹⁰⁸

This concentration on class by syndicalists was one reason why many socialists declared their methods un-English. The same argument had been used against the

104 Industrial Syndicalist, July 1910, pp.16-17.

105 Industrial Syndicalist, July 1910, p.17.

106 The Syndicalist, July 1912, in Holton, British Syndicalism, p.27.

107 Industrial Syndicalist, Dec 1910, p.18. Mann maintained an attraction for European unity, writing in his Memoirs, MacGibbon and Kee, 1967, first published 1923, p.120, 'many things could be far better managed if Europe as a whole were responsible under one administrative department; but pettifogging nationalism asserts itself'.

108 Holton, British Syndicalism, p.99.

SDF. But the syndicalists also rejected the 'traditional British institutions' of the state and parliament, which were presented as being at the core of 'British Socialism'. Mann saw parliament not as 'the people's House' but as an instrument of class rule; it

was not brought into existence to enable the working class to obtain ownership and mastery over the means of production ... Parliament was brought into existence by the ruling class ... to enable that ruling class have more effective means of dominating and subjugating the working class.¹⁰⁹

Syndicalists also rejected nationalisation, which was the Labour Party's strategy for achieving socialism. The Syndicalist Railwayman declared that workers

have little reason for placing any great confidence in the State as an employer. As the conflict 'twixt capital and labour becomes keener, the workers are having impressed upon them the real character and functions of the existing State.... The State is essentially a ruling class organisation and its functions are chiefly coercive.¹¹⁰

This meant a fundamental rejection of the belief in the unity of the nation and its expression in the state and parliament. It was a rejection of MacDonald's strategy for the Labour Party, for he believed that

the nation is not an abstraction but a real community - a community perhaps within which the relationship of classes requires constant adjustment. But it has a common life, it is an historical product, it has a law of evolution, and, regarding social agitation carried on by individuals is in reality a product of communal growth, it transforms itself. Therefore Parliament and the historical method, because they do express something deeper than class conflict, and something wider than workshop antagonisms, are the way in which the expanding life of the community creates new social states.¹¹¹

The rejection of this made syndicalist ideas incompatible with Labourism, and the fear of its increasing influence among the working class made syndicalism the target of much Labour criticism.

There were however some expressions of Englishness/Britishness from within the syndicalist movement. One of the most famous syndicalist documents, the 'Don't Shoot' leaflet, which called on soldiers not to fire on strikers, resulted in the prosecution and imprisonment of Tom Mann, Fred Bower and the Buck brothers. It stated that 'England with its fertile valleys and dells, its mineral resources, its sea harvests, is the heritage of ages to us,' and ended 'Help US to win back Britain for the British, and the World for the Workers.'¹¹² The Transport Worker reported an

109 Industrial Syndicalist, Jan 1911, p.15. Mann arrived at this position gradually, see Holton, British Syndicalism, pp.64-65.

110 Raymond Challinor, The Origins of British Bolshevism, Croom Helm, 1977, p.70.

111 MacDonald, Syndicalism, p.53.

112 Mann, Memoirs, pp.236-238.

incident in the resistance to the police baton charge on a demonstration in support of the Liverpool general strike in August 1911 thus:

To the credit of one man who showed his British pluck, and did not display absolutely disgraceful cowardice as did the police with their batons, this pedestrian threw off his coat, and putting up his fists knocked down two constables to the ground, and took their truncheons off them, but met his fate by half a dozen constables surrounding him, knocking him to the ground, and kicking him. This was too much for the crowd, and well it might be. No man if he had the sense of liberty or the feeling of a Britisher could stand such treatment.¹¹³

The first example shows that many syndicalists had passed through the socialist movement, as it echoes both Morris and Blatchford. The second example shows a continuing tradition of opposition to state authority couched in the terms of radical patriotism.

The Battle of the Ballot

The two major socialist organisations in Britain declined in the five years preceding the Great War. The ILP declined from 887 branches in 1909 to 672 branches in 1914. Between 1909 and 1911 its pamphlet sales dropped by half. The British Socialist Party claimed 40,000 members upon its founding in 1912, yet two years later its membership had halved.¹¹⁴ Neither Leonard Hall nor H. Russell Smart, leading ILP dissidents who had helped to form the new party, were present at its 1913 conference. They had both gone over to syndicalism. Hall had scrawled on the back of an envelope before the founding conference of the BSP, 'the S.D.P. resolution for Conference is too parliamentary & non-industrial & will need amending ...'¹¹⁵ These falling memberships were despite union membership rising from 2.5 million in 1910 to 4.1 million in 1914.¹¹⁶ Neither the ILP nor the BSP could relate to the massive wave of industrial unrest between 1910 and 1914. Both parties lost members to the syndicalists; Tom Mann and Guy Bowman are prominent examples of those leaving the SDP. The official historians of the BSP recorded 'a subdued mood' in 1913, because unity had not brought the expected results and syndicalist influence in the party was considerable.¹¹⁷ South Wales ILP branches were learning centres for syndicalism.¹¹⁸ The Labour Party failed to win a single by-election after the 1910 elections. Geoffrey Foote argues that syndicalism presented

113 Mann, Memoirs, p.221.

114 Morgan, 'Edwardian Socialism,' in Read (ed.) Edwardian England, p.101; Kendall, The Revolutionary Movement in Britain, p.28, 36-37, 43-44.

115 Hall to H.B Williams, 1912, BSP Collection, Coll. Misc. 155, f39, BLPES.

116 Read, 'Introduction,' in Read, Edwardian England, p.16.

117 H.W. Lee and E. Archbold, Social-Democracy in Britain, SDF, 1935, p.210.

118 Holton, British Syndicalism, p.80.

the greatest challenge to labourism since Marx, for 'while syndicalism never won over the majority of trade unionists, it fitted the realities of Edwardian Britain in which the violence of industrial strife increased distrust of a respectable Labour leadership.'¹¹⁹ Clifford Sharp wrote that 'Socialist thought, (as well as outside public opinion) is in a condition of flux,¹²⁰ and socialists sought to respond by rethinking their socialism. The Webbs saw syndicalism as 'a very natural, and ... very pardonable reaction from the intolerable social condition of today,' but leading to 'a serious deterioration of moral character'.¹²¹ With the failure of their 'crusade' on Poor Law reform, they moved towards working within the Labour Party. Likewise, G.D.H. Cole was rethinking his socialism. In 1910 he had seen the Labour Party as an 'admirable' body, but soon decided that 'the present Labour Party can never become a majority and would be sadly at a loss to know what to do if it did become one.' In developing guild socialism, he sought a transformation of society through trade unionism.¹²²

The leaders of the ILP sought to rebuild their influence and restore confidence in parliamentary socialism. Labour leaders warned of a loss of faith in both the Labour Party and parliamentarism. Hardie, closer to the mood of the rank-and-file of the party than most leaders, warned against MacDonald's elevation to chairman of the Labour Party. He wrote to Glasier:

You know I fear JRM coming into the chair. I knew it to be inevitable, but I feared it nonetheless. His mental make-up, his love of being in the know of everything, and his quite justifiable ambition, all make for a certain course which makes it easy for the party, but which appears to me to head straight for destruction. Sooner or later the revolutionary spirit of the working class will assert itself, and if it finds no response in the party in Parliament, nay finds itself regarded with scarcely concealed aversion, then the results are going to be serious. All the tricks which impose so easily upon the elected person inside will increase the fury and disgust of the men outside.¹²³

Hardie's answer was to make the ILP appear more radical; hence he told the 1912 conference that the ILP

is not a reform organisation; it is revolutionary in the fullest sense of the word.... Comrades of the working class, we do not want Parliament to give us reforms. We are not asking Parliament to do things for us. We are going to Parliament ourselves to master Parliament.¹²⁴

119 Foote, *Labour Party's Political Thought*, pp.85, 89.

120 J.M. Winter, *Socialism and the Challenge of War: Ideas and Politics in Britain 1912-18*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London and Boston, 1974, p.30.

121 Winter, *Socialism and the Challenge of War*, p.39.

122 Winter, *Socialism and the Challenge of War*, pp.100, 102.

123 Stephen R. Ward, *James Ramsay MacDonald: Low Born Among the High Brows*, Peter Lang, New York, 1990, pp.65-66.

124 *Labour Leader*, 31 May 1912.

MacDonald addressed the criticism of the Labour Party's parliamentary record at the 1911 ILP conference,

We have been told that we do not raise Socialism in the House of Commons ... and that if our members in the country could only open their newspapers one morning and read of a full-dress debate on Socialism they would be pleased. I do not know if I am differently constituted from other people, but if I found that our representatives in the House of Commons tried to appeal to me as an outsider by making propaganda speeches in the House of Commons I should be far more disgusted than pleased.¹²⁵

Not for the first time, Hardie declared MacDonald 'the greatest intellectual asset in the movement'.¹²⁶ But two years later Hardie made a speech at conference in direct contradiction to MacDonald's speech. He said that he intended 'to put down a Socialist motion calling for the overthrow of the existing order of society, and the creation of a Socialist State'. His acceptance of parliamentary procedure rather dented the impact of this, for he continued 'but unless he was fortunate at the ballot he would not have the opportunity of bringing this forward'.¹²⁷ MacDonald was temperamentally less inclined to indulge in left-wing rhetoric. Instead he sought to appeal to the common sense of the government, to strengthen the Labour Party, to keep dissent within peaceful and moderate channels. In an article at the end of 1910 he explained that the ILP had grown out of dissatisfaction within the SDF 'on the ground that it was "foreign" to British evolution and experience.' He argued that Labour was being weakened by such measures as the Osborne Judgement, which prevented trade unions from financing the Labour Party. The working class, feeling itself weakened, had to resort to other methods, and could be forced into 'the paths of revolution and anarchy'. This would 'undo those feelings of general security and confidence which have kept our political history progressive but unbroken, whilst that of other peoples has been full of gaps and sudden changes'. 'A fully armed Labour,' he declared, 'is a reasonable and peaceful Labour'.¹²⁸

Snowden, who liked showing people from the village where he had been born and brought up around Parliament, was asked by one of these whether there would be a revolution. He replied, 'I hope not, I think not. We have too many traditions, too many good things inherited from the past.' But by 1913 he warned the Commons that 'if the people lose faith in Parliament, they will turn to other methods to try to

125 ILP, Conference Report, 1911, p.68. A gap of twenty-three years separated the first two debates on socialism. Snowden in 1923 used the same motion as Hardie in 1900.

126 ILP, Conference Report, 1911, p.82.

127 ILP, Conference Report, 1913, p.73.

128 J. Ramsay MacDonald, 'The Trade Union Unrest,' English Review, Nov 1910, pp.728, 731, 739, 736.

remedy their grievances and to improve their conditions, and if Parliament fails, then the country will be given over to a condition of anarchy.'¹²⁹ Labour Leader was keen to show that parliamentary methods worked. A week after a special edition on the industrial unrest, it devoted two full pages to a report of parliamentary proceedings under the headline 'The Government and the Strikes - Labour Members Fight Men's Battles in the House of Commons.'¹³⁰ After a further year of strikes, and in the wake of the 'Don't Shoot' prosecutions which had brought syndicalism immense publicity, the ILP launched a campaign. Its aims were:

- (1) To restate the position and policy of the I.L.P.
- (2) To proclaim Socialism as the remedy for the oppression of Labour.
- (3) To drive home the lessons of the strikes, and to show the need for united political action.

A fourth aim, which remained unfulfilled before the war, was to double the membership of the ILP.¹³¹ It was made clear that the major thrust of the campaign was to restore faith in parliamentary methods. The following model resolution was provided for meetings:

That this meeting, whilst recognising the value of strikes mainly as a driving power on Parliament and as a method of securing small measures of reform and wide publicity for working-class wrongs, insists strongly that the conquest of political power and the social ownership of the means of life hold out the only hope of escape from Landlordism and Capitalism.¹³²

The ILP also issued a series of four leaflets, of which 750,000 were distributed.¹³³ One asked readers to 'Stop a Minute!':

What do you think of Parliament?

You think that Parliament is very far away. You think that what is said and done there does not closely touch you. You think that in any case you cannot move Parliament one way or the other. You are wrong on all these points....

It then corrected the misapprehending reader, claiming that Parliament had the power to give all children equal chances, to feed all children, to stamp out sweating and to fix the hours of labour.¹³⁴ Another leaflet told how voting could win liberty, strike a blow against poverty and break the power of the landlord and the capitalist. 'The vote is the symbol of your citizenship,' it declared.¹³⁵

129 Cross, Philip Snowden, pp.105, 119-120.

130 Labour Leader, 25 Aug 1911.

131 Labour Leader, 20 June 1912.

132 Labour Leader, 27 June 1912.

133 ILP, Conference Report, 1913, p.15.

134 ILP, The Power of Parliament ILP, n.d.

135 ILP, The Battle of the Ballot, ILP, n.d.

The ILP's perception was that its methods for achieving socialism were adapted to suit British conditions and the national character. Thus in its battle against syndicalist ideas it found itself defending British political institutions as much as its own conception of socialism. MacDonald declared that 'Socialism must be Parliamentary, or nothing.'¹³⁶ But the fact that this battle had to be undertaken, and with such vigour, suggests that for all the ILP's belief that permanent national characteristics favoured parliamentary change, British workers did not concur.

More Oppositional Englishness

Labour was a radical party of the opposition, and, while it may have supported the Liberal governments of 1905 onwards more than many of its supporters would have liked, it still found itself in bitter opposition to many aspects of government policy. In three areas its opposition was expressed explicitly in terms of an oppositional Englishness, above any other terms. These were relations between the governments of Britain and Russia, the treatment of South African strikers in early 1914, and the use of violence and repression by the state against opposition, whether industrial or political.

Russia under Tsarist rule was the regime most hated by the British left (including Radical Liberals), particularly after the bloody suppression of the 1905 revolution. Thus, when the Liberal government negotiated an *entente* with the government of Tsar Nicholas II in August 1907, the British left was outraged.¹³⁷ But the language with which this outrage was expressed was largely that of patriotism and a belief in the innate superiority of British forms of rule. The New Age under the editorship of A.R. Orage, a socialist under the influence of Morris-like aesthetics, declared immediately against any agreement. During the negotiations, the New Age asked, 'Is it too late to save our national honour from a gross betrayal?' Two weeks later it described a demonstration in Trafalgar Square against the negotiations as 'a number of English patriots, incensed at the idea of the foul alliance of their country with a set of brutal butchers calling themselves the Russian Empire'.¹³⁸ Once the *entente* had been signed, the New Age said that 'it is difficult for a patriotic Englishman to speak or write of the disgrace which Sir Edward Grey has brought upon the name of his country'.¹³⁹ The following year the friendship between the British and Russian

136 MacDonald, Syndicalism, p.6.

137 A.J.A. Morris, Radicalism against War, 1906-1914, Longman, 1972, pp.181-182 points out that Radicals were less united than Labour in their opposition to the government's Russian policy. Some Radicals believed Anglo-Russian friendship would, according to the Manchester Guardian, 'diminish very sensibly the risks of a European war,' while Radicals interested in the Balkans also saw advantages in the friendship. But despite this Labour could offer no policy distinctive from the Radicals, Morris, pp.204, 206-207.

138 New Age, 4 and 18 July 1907.

139 New Age, 5 Sept 1907.

governments developed further, and an official visit by King Edward VII to the Tsar was planned. MacDonald simply called this 'an insult to our country'.¹⁴⁰ But difficulties set in. In 1902, when Edward VII was crowned, the Labour Party in Parliament had not existed. The ILP could at that time afford a measure of republicanism. Hence it had issued two leaflets against the monarchy, though neither called for abolition.¹⁴¹ But by 1908 the Labour Party was searching for 'respectability', so while the leaders were still theoretically republicans, in practice republicanism had been dropped. As Snowden explained, when directly asked about the issue, 'In theory I am a republican, but I attach so little importance to this as a practical question that I would not lift my little finger to interfere with the monarchy.'¹⁴² MacDonald again sought to theorise this position. Since, he argued, the power of the monarchy was only held in potential, but not used,

the political reformer may pass it by without notice, even though on political grounds he may be a republican.... Indeed, he may see in it some utilitarian value. When, like ours, it is an old and well-established part of the constitution ... it preserves for the execution of ... ceremonies that dignified formality which is essential to their being done well.¹⁴³

Therefore, when it came to attacking the King's visit to Russia, James O'Grady explained to the House of Commons that

whatever strong criticisms the Labour Party might have to offer - and in this matter he spoke for his colleagues - ... they wanted in no sense to say anything that would reflect upon the honour of His Majesty the King. No one could object to an ordinary English gentleman visiting his relatives. It was only when they heard that this visit was to be of a representative character that they raised their protest. He desired to say that Gentlemen on his side of the House had nothing but the highest admiration for the splendid and noble work which His Majesty had done in the cause of the amity of nations and of international peace.¹⁴⁴

Hardie, who had a reputation as an extreme republican, having once written that 'the life of one Welsh miner is of greater commercial and moral value to the British nation than the whole Royal Crowd put together, from the Royal Great Grand-Mama to this puling Royal Great Grand-Child,'¹⁴⁵ now sought to offer advice on

140 Labour Leader, 29 May 1908.

141 Mock Loyalty, ILP Platform no. 48, 1902, and On Royalty, ILP Platform no. 59, 1902.

142 Socialism - Yes or No, n.d., pp.17-18. A verbatim report of a debate between Snowden and Sir William Bull MP on 22 November 1907.

143 Socialism and Government II, pp.40-42.

144 HC Debates, 4:190, 211-212, 4 June 1908.

145 Labour Leader, 30 June 1894, in Kenneth O. Morgan, Keir Hardie: Radical and Socialist, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1975, pp.71-72. It was on the occasion of the birth of a child to the Duchess of York, which coincided with the deaths of 251 men and boys at the Albion Colliery in east Glamorgan. See also Caroline Benn, Keir Hardie, Hutchinson, 1992, pp.122-123.

upholding the position of the monarchy. 'If the initiative did not come from the King, but from the Government,' he urged, 'it would do much to enhance the King's position and reputation among the bulk of the people of this country.' Happily, the foreign secretary was able to assure him that the government took all responsibility.¹⁴⁶

It was only after making clear that their later comments were not meant to cause offence to the King that O'Grady and Hardie made their main points. O'Grady spoke of 'this country [that] loved free institutions, the right of free speech and a free press ... things [that] could not be said to exist in Russia,' and warned that 'if we mixed in evil company the result was bound to be that we should be to a certain extent contaminated.' Hardie said it was not too late to cancel the visit, for 'better far would it be to offend the Czar than the best blood and conscience of the British Empire.'¹⁴⁷

When in 1909 the Tsar made a visit to the Cowes regatta, all the previous year's sentiments came out once again. The Labour Party issued a manifesto saying, 'It is an insult to our national good fame and to our self-respect that our Sovereign should receive *in our name* the head of such a state.'¹⁴⁸ At the Trafalgar Square demonstration called by the Labour Party on the 25 July 1909, it was asked, 'Will the hand of England be stained by grasping his?'¹⁴⁹ Hardie, in the Commons, contrasted the political situations of the two countries: 'The Czar is the head of a practically autocratic state. King Edward is the head of a more or less popular and democratic government.'¹⁵⁰ The Labour Party opposition was based on a belief in the superiority of British over Russian rule, and made no mention of the British Empire. Victor Grayson, while condemning the Tsar's visit, had to declare that 'I do not associate myself with the idea that we have so much right to assume an attitude of superiority.'¹⁵¹

A second example of oppositional Englishness is given by the response of the British labour movement to the state's suppression of the South African general strike of early 1914, when among other measures martial law was declared and nine trade union leaders were deported. The majority of the labour leaders in Britain presented this as an attack upon popular English liberties.¹⁵² The protests in Britain

146 HC Debates, 4:190, 259, 4 June 1908.

147 HC Debates, 4:190, 212, 261. 4 June 1908.

148 ILP, By Order of the Czar: Death and Imprisonment, Common Sense Politics no. 11, ILP, 1909. Original emphasis.

149 John Gorman, Images of Labour, Scorpion, n.p., 1985, p.85.

150 HC Debates, 5:6, 678, 22 July 1909.

151 HC Debates, 5:6, 728, 22 July 1909.

152 See Logie Barrow, 'White Solidarity in 1914' in Raphael Samuel (ed.), Patriotism Volume I History and Politics, 3 volumes, Routledge, 1989, pp.275-287, who argues that the response stressed that the events were an attack upon white labour within the Empire. This is not incompatible with the argument presented here.

were massive. Justice estimated that 250,000 took part in the demonstration of 1 March, and the Clarion reported a procession seven miles long.¹⁵³ This demonstration had been called by the South Africa Constitutional Rights Committee, with a resolution condemning 'the action of the South African Government in declaring martial law and deporting nine trade union leaders, whom we heartily welcome to this country, ... [as] a direct denial of the fundamental rights of British citizenship.'¹⁵⁴ J. Bruce Glasier urged as many as possible to respond to the call of the organisers, in language drawing together themes of class and nation, in which the latter dominated:

Now may our old England of the main from her freedom's height blow her thunder across the seas! Now may the workers of Great Britain run up the Red Flag and the Union Jack side by side! Now may the beacon fires of public opinion be lighted from town to town and the old Magna Charta and Habeas Corpus which our fathers won for us with their blood be unrolled once more in the sun and borne as an oriflamme by a ten-millioned host to the Houses of Parliament! For now surely, the hour has come when this old England - this Britannia - of ours, should send forth her Grand Remonstrance.¹⁵⁵

In the Commons, MacDonald led the Labour protest. He drew on ideas of English liberty, but also those of his own 'Imperial Standard', that was meant to carry English liberty to all corners of the Empire. He began by saying that 'the South African Government ... is destroying the constitutional liberties of the British people, and that is doing a great disservice to the Empire of which it is part,' and soon moved on to echoing Palmerston:

Is there any meaning at all in the expression *Civis Britannicus sum*? Has it any common meaning from one end of the Empire to the other? Is it going to give us any pride, any inspiration? Is it or not, a fact that privileges habeas corpus, Petition of Rights, and so on, have given us are going to be carried with us wherever we go, provided we keep under the shadow of the Union Jack and within the bounds of the British Empire? Is that going to be the case or not? If it is not, I venture to say your Empire cannot possibly remain in the place of honour it occupies to-day. If the civil liberty which is ours, the civil liberty which has come to us, not merely by accidental events, but because it is essential to the very spirit and genius of our people, is not going to be an assumption in the constitutional procedure of the Governments of our self-governing communities, then the expression 'Empire' must be used in future in an exceedingly narrow sense. But it is because, at the back of my mind, that I have an idea that Empire really stands for something that is constitutionally magnificent, that I feel I am in duty bound to raise this question.¹⁵⁶

153 Justice, 5 March 1914; Clarion, 6 March 1914.

154 Justice, 26 Feb 1914.

155 Labour Leader, 26 Feb 1914.

156 HC Debates, 5:58, 367-368, 12 Feb 1914.

The Labour Party did not base its response on the international interests of the working class, but on the threat to the Empire and the liberties of citizens.

The third example is the response of the British labour movement to the use of violence and repression by the state. It has already been shown that a connection had been made between the state/parliament and a view of Britain, progressing through its history towards democracy and increasing popular liberties. The use of state violence told against this view. The leaders of the labour movement therefore opposed state violence as something foreign to this development. Examples of this approach are found in socialist newspaper headlines above the accounts of domestic state violence, and it was usually with Russia that comparisons were made. Thus when police attacked the demonstration of 14 July 1907 in Trafalgar Square against the Anglo-Russian entente, the New Age wrote of 'Russia in Trafalgar Square' and 'The Whitehall Cossacks', and Justice asked: 'Are Scotland Yard and the Foreign Office controlled from St Petersburg?'¹⁵⁷ When the British in India acted against Indian nationalists, Justice called these 'Russian Methods of British Rule in India' and 'Muscovite-Liberal Methods in India,' and the Labour Leader spoke of 'The Russianisation of India'.¹⁵⁸ Other examples include the Labour Leader describing 'Tsar Haldane and Territorial Serfs' in relation to the new Territorial Army, and describing the prosecutions over the 'Don't Shoot!' manifesto as 'Russian Methods'. Birmingham BSP, referring to the jailing of Tom Mann, asked, 'DO YOU KNOW THAT a determined attempt is being made to Russianise England and that the first steps are the suppression of free speech, and incarceration of all agitators and reformers?'¹⁵⁹ The use of repression was portrayed as something un-English and alien, and was opposed as a conspiracy. While this allowed the left to portray itself as the upholder of a more true Englishness, it also meant subscribing to a belief in the superiority of English government.

* * * * *

In the Edwardian period, the long hoped for 'labour alliance' became a reality. Trade unions were convinced by hostile legal decisions that their interests needed to be represented at Westminster, and to achieve this they combined with the socialist

157 New Age, 18 July and 1 Aug 1907; Justice, 20 July 1907. The crowd chanted 'Down with the English Cossacks!' Gorman, Images of Labour, pp.85-86.

158 Justice, 23 Feb and 28 Sept 1907; Labour Leader, 12 June 1908.

159 Labour Leader, 26 Feb 1909, 29 March 1912; Special Supplement and Programme of the Third BSP Concert at the Colonnade Hotel, 30 March 1912, BSP Collection, Coll. Misc. 155, f96, BLPES. Elsewhere in the programme a joke was made of Mann's incarceration: 'It is no new experience for Tom Mann to be behind bars. He kept a pub 30 years ago.'

societies, often despite their socialism. The supporters of this alliance in the ILP found in it no conflict with their own perception of politics. Their view of national history made parliament the legitimate arena for social change. The House of Commons stood at the centre of the advance to liberty. This conception was only strengthened by the constitutional struggle against the House of Lords. The left continued to employ a radical patriotic vocabulary against infringements of English liberty.

But the supporters of the labour alliance found their beliefs threatened by the left of the labour movement, indeed by the working class itself. Syndicalism and industrial unrest menaced the parliamentary socialists' version of British national identity. Tortuous arguments were often necessary to explain why British workers, with their innate common sense, were taking to strike action which appeared to be inspired by the foreign doctrine of syndicalism. These arguments were also voiced by commentators outside the labour movement:

When we consider the general character of the population of these islands, it seems to be very unlikely that a doctrine which preaches the violent seizure of property, whose advocates make it their business to promote class warfare, and to stir up discord between employers and employees, would find many adherents among British wage-earners. And no doubt, if Syndicalism were presented to them in its naked deformity, it would be indignantly repudiated; but there is some danger lest our workmen should be led to adopt methods which are practically identical with those advocated by Syndicalists, in ignorance of the inherent brutality of that doctrine.¹⁶⁰

Englishness alone was not felt adequate to prevent workers turning away from parliamentary methods. The political socialists thought it necessary to embark upon campaigns to convince their audience of the efficacy of parliament. These campaigns, as a side effect, reinforced more traditional views of what constituted legitimate politics in Britain.

160 Sir Arthur Clay, Syndicalism and Labour, John Murray, 1911, p.92.

Socialism and the German Menace in Edwardian Britain

Edwardian society witnessed a marked growth in militarist sentiment and its expression. Pressure groups claiming large memberships were formed to promote conscription and a bigger Royal Navy. Invasion and spy scares flared up.¹ This was the result of an increasing awareness of the commercial and military threat to Britain's established position posed by an ascendant Germany,² combined with the 'lesson' of the Boer War, revealing British military inefficiency and the poor physical condition of potential army recruits.³ Internally this led to reorganisation of imperial and home defences, driven forward by the creed of national efficiency, while externally British governments sought to end the nation's diplomatic isolation through understandings with Japan, France and Russia.

The British left responded with an unbalanced two-pronged approach. The first element of this was an indifference to foreign policy at state level, remaining largely willing simply to blame 'capitalism' for all events. C.H. Norman, in an article in The New Age censuring this neglect of foreign policy, argued that it was due to a belief that socialism was only economic, that it was difficult to obtain accurate information, that there was a sparsity of democrats in the diplomatic service, that the principles of foreign policy were obscure and tedious to study, and that this resulted in a general lack of interest and a willingness to leave it to experts.⁴ William P. Maddox has calculated that between 1906 and 1914 only three and a half per cent of Labour MPs' speeches and questions in the House of Commons were related to foreign policy.⁵ The second element was an enjoyment in campaigning against the most visible foreign policy events,⁶ and involvement in the Second International, since it gave an impression of internationalism.

1 See Anne Summers, 'Edwardian Militarism,' in Raphael Samuel (ed.) Patriotism Volume I History and Politics, Routledge, 1989, pp.236-256; A.J.A. Morris, The Scaremongers: The Advocacy of War and Rearmament 1896-1914, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984.

2 See Paul M. Kennedy, The Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism 1860-1914, Ashfield, London and New York, 1987.

3 G.R. Searle, The Quest for National Efficiency: A Study in British Politics and Political Thought, 1899-1914, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1971, chapters 1 to 3. The agitations that followed also had party political purposes, see, for example, Frans Coetzee, For Party or Country: Nationalism and the Dilemmas of Popular Conservatism in Edwardian England, Oxford UP, Oxford, 1990.

4 C.H. Norman, 'Social Democracy and Foreign Policy', The New Age, 9 Sept 1909.

5 Colin Cross, Philip Snowden, Barrie and Rockcliff, 1966, p.123.

6 See pp.118-120 above for reactions to Anglo-Russian diplomacy.

But the response of the left was not united. And this also showed an imbalance, for while the majority of the left could be termed anti-militarist, opposing increased armaments, two of the largest circulation socialist newspapers, Clarion and Justice, regularly gave much space to the minority who argued that there was a 'German Menace' which had to be countered by increased arms spending. The fact that two vocal minorities, one within general political society, the other within the socialist movement, were questioning whether the British nation could continue its existence without a drastic reorganisation of the national life meant that ideas of what constituted the nation, its character and interests were widely discussed on the left.

Socialists and National Defence

The policy of the Second International was complete opposition to any increase in armaments. But since its foundation in 1889 it had also supported the right of national defence.⁷ An historian of the collapse of the Second International has described this policy as anti-militarism reconciled with a 'Jacobinical patriotism'.⁸ Many French socialists were deeply attached to the French revolutionary tradition, from which they arrived at a position of defence of the Republic. Vaillant, from the Blanquist tradition, argued in 1904 that 'the Republic is the necessary *milieu* for proletarian emancipation,' and that his group was 'ready to sacrifice their lives to save it'. Likewise, Jean Jaurès pointed out that the French Revolutionaries had been internationalists, but patriots too. Hence he argued

if we, French Socialists, were indifferent to the honor, to the security, to the prosperity of France, it would not only be a crime against *la patrie* ... it would be a crime against humanity. A free, great, strong France is necessary to humanity. It is in France that democracy has obtained its most logical form - the Republic; and if France falls reaction will rise in the world.

An historian of French socialist patriotism has pointed out that while Jaurès was a sincere advocate of peace,

as the foremost socialist leader and as the chief commentator on foreign affairs in L'Humanité he taught the Socialists to defend France, to view Germany with suspicion, to respect Russia as France's necessary ally, to regard the severance of Alsace-Lorraine as an unpunished crime, to favor French imperialism, and in general to approach the international situation from 'the national point of view'.⁹

7 James Joll, The Second International 1889-1914, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1955, pp.45-46.

8 Georges Haupt, Socialism and the Great War: The Collapse of the Second International, Clarendon, Oxford, 1973, p.131.

9 Harold R. Weinstein, Jean Jaurès: A Study of Patriotism in the French Socialist Movement, Columbia UP, New York, 1936, pp.157, 64-65, 133.

Hence in August 1914, despite Jaurès' assassination, French socialists put memories of the French Revolution at the service of the *Union Sacrée*.¹⁰

German socialist leaders had given little attention to foreign affairs until their parliamentary representation was halved in the election of 1907 which the government had fought as 'a great test of whether Germany is capable of developing from a European into a world power or not'.¹¹ While the left of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) wanted increased agitation against militarism, leaders such as August Bebel wanted to refute the 'slandorous' charges that the SPD was anti-national. He maintained that social changes were necessary, and explained that 'what we oppose is not so much the idea of a fatherland as such, that anyway belongs to the proletariat rather than the ruling classes, but the conditions ... prevailing in this fatherland of ours'.¹² Gustav Noske told the *Reichstag* after the elections that the SPD's stand on militarism was 'conditioned by our acceptance of the principle of nationality'. Social Democrats, he said, would defend the nation 'with as much determination as any gentleman on the right side of this House'.¹³ Vollmar, leader of Bavaria's social-democrats, told the Bavarian *diet* in 1912 that 'if Germany became involved in a war not of her own making ... the fatherland's need would take precedence over all other considerations ... and social-democrats would prove themselves to be not the least of its defenders'.¹⁴ With the two major socialist parties in Europe both believing in national defence, the action of the Second International could only result in what one historian has called 'the dialogue of the deaf'.¹⁵

The alternative to such national defencism was known in the decade before the First World War as 'Hervéism', after the French socialist Gustave Hervé, who argued that workers had no country and should turn their guns on their own ruling classes. But it was a minority position across Europe.¹⁶ All sections of the British delegation to the 1907 Stuttgart International Congress supported the anti-war

10 John Schwarzmantel, 'Nationalism and the French Working-Class Movement 1905-14,' in Eric Cahm and V.C. Fiserà (eds.), Socialism and Nationalism in Contemporary Europe (1848-1945) Volume 2, Spokesman, Nottingham, 1979, p.78.

11 Carl E. Schorske, German Social Democracy 1905-1917, Harper Torchbooks, New York, 1972, p.59.

12 Schorske, German Social Democracy, pp.75-76; Dieter Groh, 'The "Unpatriotic Socialists" and the State,' Journal of Contemporary History, 1966, vol. 1, no. 4, p.157.

13 Schorske, German Social Democracy, p.77.

14 Groh, 'The "Unpatriotic Socialists",' p.161.

15 Jolyon Howorth, 'The Left in France and Germany, Internationalism and War: A Dialogue of the Deaf 1900-1914,' in Cahm and Fiserà (eds.), Socialism and Nationalism, pp.81-100.

16 Hervé's books, Anti-Patriotism and My Country, Right or Wrong, 1910, were translated into English, and circulated by the Socialist Labour Party and some syndicalists such as Guy Bowman, the translator of one. Walter Kendall, The Revolutionary Movement in Britain 1900-21: The Origins of British Communism, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969, pp.49, 75.

resolution which also reaffirmed the policy of national defence.¹⁷

This position of national defence shows the limited differences between those in Britain who were anti-militarists and those who were anti-Germans. The commitment to national defence led to a conflict with the idea of a single international working class interest, since it logically led to the conclusion that all classes within a given territory had at least a single common interest opposed to the interests of those of all classes within other territories, and which overrode class interests. Harry Quelch, an anti-German in the SDF/BSP, thus presented an argument with which few anti-militarists would have disagreed:

Convinced internationalists as we are, recognizing that, theoretically, there is no cause of quarrel between the workers of the world; that the proletarian has no country to fight for, and, therefore no occasion to fight - we must recognize that as a matter of fact humanity is at present divided into different nationalities with conflicting interests.... I submit here that, in the main, we have, for practical purposes, to take the present groupings of peoples in Europe as a working basis, and to recognize that willy-nilly there is, as a rule, in each national group, in spite of all differences, certain principles which bind together as a nation those within that group, and that notwithstanding personal, class, and other antagonisms, are bound together by a common interest to defend the national autonomy and the right of each nationality to work out its own salvation.¹⁸

Quelch argued for a citizen army and a strong navy, but acceptance of this position meant that even anti-militarists would not deny Britain adequate defence. Thus Labour Leader declared in 1910 that 'no sane politician would dream of opposing expenditure necessary for National Defence,'¹⁹ and MacDonald told the Commons in 1911 that the Labour Party 'stood for adequate national security'.²⁰ The anti-militarists' opposition to armaments was not therefore unconditional. They argued simply that even with reductions the adequate defence of the nation could be maintained. William Brace in the Commons in 1907:

protested against any Members suggesting that they were greater friends of the Navy than the Labour members. Everyone in the House was a friend of the Navy. It was because he was a friend of the Navy that he ventured to say that it had now reached such a point that it was possible to have the reduction which many in the country desired.²¹

Again, in response to taunts from Conservative MPs, George Barnes defended

17 Douglas J. Newton, British Labour, European Socialism and the Struggle for Peace 1889-1914, Clarendon, Oxford, 1985, p.167.

18 Harry Quelch, Socialism and Foreign Affairs (1912), in Henry Pelling (ed.) The Challenge of Socialism, Adam and Charles Black, 1954, pp.141-142.

19 Labour Leader, 18 March 1910.

20 House of Commons Parliamentary Debates 5th series, vol. 22, col. 2480, 16 March 1911.

21 HC Debates, 4:170, 700-702, 5 March 1907.

Labour's stance; beginning with internationalism he showed how this was both in a British and a patriotic tradition:

The right hon. Gentleman the Leader of the Opposition rather chided my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydvil (Mr. Keir Hardie) last week because he said he was always arguing in favour of other countries and against his own. Why should he not? Why should I not? After all, we have great examples to follow in this respect. If one goes back over the history of our own country, we find men like John Bright and others who have stood up on many occasions, as we are endeavouring to stand up now. It is no dishonour surely to tell one's own country when he thinks it is in the wrong. That is the position we take up. We yield to nobody in love for our country; we yield to nobody in our desire to see it adequately protected ... but ... we on these benches are going to take upon ourselves the responsibility of saying when we think this country is being badly advised.²²

Since it was not a principle at stake but a different interpretation of the requirements of the defence of the nation it meant that some Labour MPs refused to vote against armaments reductions, or even voted for increases. Douglas J. Newton has shown how the Labour Party in Parliament was divided over voting for or against armaments increases. In March 1906 seven Labour MPs voted with the Government on increased naval estimates, in 1907 three refused to support a reduction motion, in March 1909 two supported the Government, in July 1909 five voted against reductions. The affiliation of the Miners' Federation MPs increased the rebel faction. Thus, in March 1910, eight Labour MPs voted with the Government. In March 1911 six voted against a Radical motion to cut the Royal Navy by a thousand men. On this occasion only seventeen Labour MPs voted for the motion, another eighteen being absent. Newton comments that this 'vote was final proof that less than half the Labour Party's MPs could be relied upon in the House to support proposals to reduce armaments, in spite of all the efforts [of] the ILP, in spite of the influence exerted by the leadership, and in defiance of the Labour Party Conference'. In July 1912, eight rebelled against the Labour Party, voting against another Radical motion for reduction of the Navy. The rebels on this occasion included Labour's chief whip, G.H Roberts.²³ Some of these rebellions could be explained by the fact that Labour MPs represented arsenal or dockyard seats, for example, Woolwich, Chatham and Barrow. J.H. Jenkins, Alex Wilkie, Charles Duncan and Will Crooks all represented such seats and were regular rebels. But others such as Bowerman

22 HC Debates, 5:23, 114, 20 March 1911. This was of course also a Liberal tradition. During the Naval Scare of 1909 Arthur Henderson reproached the Government for 'the abandonment of the position for which Liberalism has been forced to stand as the stout defender in this country', HC Debates, 5:2, 1133, 17 March 1909.

23 Newton, British Labour, European Socialism and the Struggle for Peace, pp.158, 182-183, 204, 205, 235-236, 237, 244, 302.

and Wilson had no such direct interest. Thus A.H. Lee's taunt that, if Labour MPs represented dockyards or arsenals, 'there are no greater jingoes in the House,' whereas if they represented Midlands seats (he gave MacDonald's seat Leicester as an example), they talked of parasites, while having some truth in it, was not entirely accurate.²⁴ These rebels shared the majority of the left's belief in national defence, and believed the international situation would allow no reductions in spending. J.A. Seddon, an ILP member, supported Haldane's Territorial and Reserve Forces Bill, saying, 'I am not one of those who say there should be no defence of the nation. Notwithstanding what may be said against the old country, I think it is still the best country, and I am prepared under proper conditions to see that it is defended.'²⁵ John Ward declared that 'so far as I am concerned I am going to give no vote during the discussion on the Navy estimates, which at some future time when the defences of the country are put to the test I may be sorry for.'²⁶ To show just how close the position of anti-militarists could be to those who voted for arms increases, it is worth quoting MacDonald in 1912. He said 'I am not going to do anything or say anything which would deliberately at any given moment, in 1912 say, so diminish our power of self-defence that it would be unequal to any struggle which might be put upon us. I am not going to say that; I have never said it and I never will say it.'²⁷

A further way in which socialists and Labour MPs justified support for military expenditure increases was to argue that it lay outside the sphere of party politics. This was the line that Blatchford had taken in the Boer War, with his statement that 'when England is at war I'm English. I have no politics and no party. I am English.'²⁸ After the war, when he had come to believe that Germany posed a military threat to Britain, he continued to argue this, though he added an anti-democratic tinge to it. He said party politics wasted time in discussion on armaments expenditure, calling this 'the unpatriotic squabbling of our political parties'.²⁹ Six months later he wrote that 'the problem of the army is how to get rid of the foolish clique of meddling civilians who have left us ... in a worse condition than we have been in for the last fifty years.... The Army should be managed by soldiers.'³⁰ The following month he called for 'a determined public and - a MAN' to avert the danger.³¹ After a series of

24 HC Debates, 5:22, 2477-2478, 16 March 1911.

25 HC Debates, 5:1, 1652, 4 March 1909.

26 HC Debates, 5:2, 977, 16 March 1909.

27 HC Debates, 5:41, 877, 22 July 1912.

28 Clarion, 21 Oct 1899.

29 Clarion, 17 June 1904.

30 Clarion, 20 Jan 1905.

31 Clarion, 17 Feb 1905. Compare this to Kipling's dictum that the 'job belongs to the man who can do it', Lord Birkenhead, Rudyard Kipling, Star/W.H. Allen, 1978, pp.216-217.

articles written by Blatchford appeared in the Daily Mail during the election campaign at the end of 1909, he explained to Clarion readers that 'the appeal I made was a national appeal; it has been misread as a Party stratagem.' He continued:

I am a Socialist, not a Liberal nor a Tory. But I made my appeal to the Empire, not as a Socialist, but as a British citizen.... Imperial defence is not a party question: it is an Imperial question. We who believe that national security should come before all party questions, make our appeal to all Britons as Britons.³²

The New Age, another socialist newspaper which supported the demand for a big Navy, also argued that questions of national defence should be 'raised out of the sphere of party politics. There is no conceivable reason why the differences which separate Liberals, Conservatives, and Socialists in regard to internal affairs should also separate them in regard to the question of National Defence.'³³ In the Commons, Labour MPs voting against their party often did so with the explanation that 'it was not a political question'.³⁴ Alexander Wilkie told the Commons that he 'always was more or less of the opinion that in this House we approach the question of our first line of defence on non-party lines, and from a national or Imperial position'.³⁵ Those on the left were not alone in seeking to raise the question of defence above party politics; indeed National Efficiency, which was more usually associated with the right, disparaged party politics in favour of the expert.³⁶

Even anti-militarists drew an eventual line between defence of the nation and their opposition to increased armaments. Philip Snowden was one of the principal speakers on the ILP anti-militarist campaign of 1913-1914. He argued:

It is not in the courts of kings nor in the chambers of diplomacy that the war problem is going to be solved. The workers of all lands are increasingly recognising that militarism and capitalism are the common enemies of the workers of all lands. Thirteen millions of men in Europe are enrolled under the red Flag of Socialism, and in that fact you have a stronger safeguard of peace than in all your battleships and all your armed camps.

Yet he qualified such statements, continuing that 'much as we who sit on these benches oppose war, I am sure we should not hesitate for a moment to vote any sum, however large, if we were convinced that it was absolutely necessary for the defence of our own shores.'³⁷ It was statements such as this that led Blatchford to comment that 'the Labour Party seem to me to fall between ... two stools. They

32 'Wanted, a Man! An Appeal to the British People!' Clarion, 31 Dec 1909.

33 The New Age, 14 March 1908.

34 J.H. Jenkins, HC Debates, 4:170, 1052.

35 HC Debates, 5:2, 1548, 22 March 1909.

36 Searle, The Quest for National Efficiency, chapter 3.

37 Cross, Snowden, p.129.

object to expenditure on the Navy and the Army; but they have never spoken out boldly for the abolition of the Navy and the Army.'³⁸ Effectively, therefore, the division on the left over the question of national defence was over the nature of the threat faced by Britain, with the anti-militarists arguing that no real threat existed. F.W. Jowett replied to Blatchford's comment that only a small but efficient army and navy were needed, and 'the bulk of those who find themselves unable to agree with you [over the size of the armed forces] ... would never think of making use of such an argument [as abolition of all defence]. They are men and women who love their country, as you do.'³⁹ Jowett was perfectly correct; apart from the small Socialist Labour Party and Socialist Party of Great Britain there were very few socialists who rejected the idea of national defence.⁴⁰

Socialists and Patriotism in Edwardian Britain

One socialist who did reject national defence was Belfort Bax. In 1911 he wrote an article entitled 'Patriotism v. Socialism', in which he declared that he was 'an internationalist to the point of absolute indifference to the national interests of any particular country, my own included.' He was, he said, an 'anti-patriot' wishing to see the British 'punished and humiliated in their national vanity'.⁴¹ The response was an article by F. Victor Fisher. It was called 'Patriotism *and* Socialism'.⁴² Fisher refused to debate publicly with Bax since 'the very worst thing the Socialist movement could do is convince the great mass of the people, who must be converted to Socialism if Socialism is to be realised, that Socialism entails anti-patriotism.' As a mirror image to the anti-patriots there was in Edwardian Britain a small group of socialists who saw patriotism as essential to the advancement of socialism. This was simply a continuation of the 'Merrie England' theme, but with the patriotism element pushed to the fore in a period when international tensions gave it added significance. This group of socialists, led by Fisher, went on to form the core of the labour 'super patriots' during the First World War. Hence their super-patriotism was not a sudden aberration caused by war, but a logical outcome of their

38 Clarion, 16 April 1909.

39 Clarion, 23 April 1909.

40 Both groups that had split from the SDF. See Kendall, The Revolutionary Movement in Britain, chapter 4 and Raymond Challinor, The Origins of British Bolshevism, Croom Helm, 1977 for the Socialist Labour Party.

41 Justice, 22 July 1911. Bax in fact went on to support the British war effort in 1914, though he continued to deny that he was patriotic. He claimed that 'the Allied Powers may have all the evil qualities in their governmental institutions, as in the economic system common to all existing States, that Socialist criticism ascribes to them, and yet they may be wholly in the right as regards the specific issue of the present struggle,' E.B. Bax, Reminiscences and Reflexions of a Mid and Late Victorian, George Allen and Unwin, 1918, pp.254-255.

42 Justice, 29 July 1911. Original emphasis.

pre-war political thought, a point to which neither of their historians draws attention.⁴³

These socialists accepted the nation and patriotism as real and permanent forces. Hedley V. Storey believed that 'Love of Native Land is not mere sentiment: It is a great fact. It is inevitable. It grows out of the nature of things.'⁴⁴ Likewise, Fisher wrote that 'the ties of blood are a real and natural factor of deep potency. The ties of common tradition are the steel links of nationhood.... And just as a son loves and protects his mother with the most tender love, so the citizen should love and defend the motherland.'⁴⁵ Fisher's version of England contained little of which even the most conservative patriot could disapprove, for besides its land, sea, rivers, hills and woods, it also included its physical prowess and military achievement.⁴⁶ Harry Roberts, another patriot-socialist, described England as:

a beautiful and a fertile land, with glorious hills and woods and deep-blossomed valleys, and bordered by the sea; with a great and romantic history; and peopled by an industrious, hardy, kindly, thrifty race. All the ingredients for a Heaven.⁴⁷

Roberts was the author of a series of seven articles hoping to appeal 'to public-spirited men of all Parties and all schools of political thought to lay aside their labels for a moment and consider (as patriotic Englishmen) the problem of England and the English people.' Blatchford was indignant. He wrote to A.M. Thompson, 'Every paragraph of the articles by Roberts ought to begin: "As R[obert] B[latchford] says in Merrie E[ngland]"; or "as RB says in the Dispatch," or "as RB said in the Mail, in B[ritain] for the British, in the Clarion," or "as A.M. T[hompson] says in the Clarion," or "as A.M.T. said in his book on Japan." But he never even mentions us.'⁴⁸

These socialists urged the rest of the left to take the national and patriotic way to socialism, 'the safest and quickest, and the best'.⁴⁹ Lack of patriotism by socialists was seen as an obstacle to socialism. Harry Roberts argued that 'for a Socialist to refer to the defence of England otherwise than with a sneer is to mark himself down as a renegade and a traitor to all the principles of the "wee free kirk" of Socialism ...

43 See Roy Douglas, 'The National Democratic Party and the British Workers' League,' Historical Journal, vol. XV, no. 3, 1972, pp.533-552, and J.O. Stubbs, 'Lord Milner and Patriotic Labour, 1914-1918,' English Historical Review, vol. 87, 1972, pp. 717-754.

44 Clarion, 16 June 1911.

45 Justice, 29 July 1911.

46 Justice, 29 July 1911; Clarion, 10 Jan 1913.

47 'Towards a National Policy: I. England and the English People,' Clarion, 24 March 1911.

48 Blatchford Letters to Thompson, MS. F 920 5 B27, vol. 2, folio 16, Manchester Central Library.

49 Hedley V. Storey, 'The Patriot and Socialism,' Clarion, 16 June 1911.

This is one of the many reasons why Socialists are not more popular with the average Englishman.⁵⁰ Fisher agreed: 'If Socialism becomes synonymous with treason to the British national integrity and safety, or to the national traditions and temperament, we may bid a long farewell to the realisation of Socialist hopes and aims.'⁵¹

These patriot-socialists therefore combined demands for 'an invincible Navy' and compulsory military training with 'a patriotism which cares for England, and its order and its character, and its honour as a good housewife cares for her home'.⁵² Storey urged that 'therefore every Socialist should be a Patriot and preach Patriotism as part of his gospel'.⁵³ A practical proposal along these lines was proposed in a pamphlet by A.P. Hazell and W. Cook, with a preface by Jack Williams. All three were members of the SDF. This pamphlet, called Work for the Unemployed! A National Highway for Military and Motor Traffic, was published by the Twentieth Century Press, which was the SDF's publishing company, but was not an official publication. It proposed an extensive network of roads around Britain, since 'it is plain enough that, if some solution is not found for the social evil arising out of competition, that the majority of the people must continue to physically degenerate and become unable to defend themselves against their national enemies'.⁵⁴ This national highway was to consist of a forty feet wide zone including a light railway and track for cycles and general traffic, a mono-railway allowing travel between London and Edinburgh in three hours, and a sixty feet wide 'motor track and military road'.⁵⁵ This Bonapartist or Hitlerian fantasy was seen as both socialist palliative and patriotic endeavour.

The German Menace

The significance of national defencism rises considerably when a nation is perceived to be in danger, and in Edwardian society there was a national anxiety about invasion by Germany expressed through repeated naval scares, invasion stories and fear of spies. A minority of socialists shared this anxiety; foremost among them were H.M. Hyndman and Robert Blatchford, two of Britain's most prominent socialists. This is partly the explanation for the imbalance between the anti-Germans' numbers and their impact. Since the Clarion was privately owned and

50 Clarion, 7 April 1911.

51 Clarion, 10 Jan 1913.

52 Harry Roberts, 'Towards a National Policy: III. The Defence of England,' Clarion, 7 April 1911; 'VII. Conclusion. An Appeal to English Nationalists,' Clarion, 5 May 1911.

53 Clarion, 16 June 1911.

54 A.P. Hazell and W. Cook, Work for the Unemployed!, Twentieth Century Press, n.d., p.5.

55 Work for the Unemployed, diagram on pp.8-9.

edited by its proprietors, Blatchford and A.M. Thompson, it had no requirement to be representative, except to the extent that circulation had to be maintained. The election of twenty-nine Labour MPs in 1906 led to a massive rise in circulation of all the socialist newspapers, including the Clarion, despite its anti-Germanism. In January 1906, the Clarion claimed a circulation of 56,000; two and a half years later it claimed 82,100.⁵⁶ Justice, since its foundation in 1884 had borne the subtitle 'The Organ of Social Democracy', and was the official organ of the SDF and subsequently the BSP. However it was not owned by the party but by the Twentieth Century Press Ltd, since the party having no existence in law could not own property. This made conference control over Justice difficult. The editors, Harry Quelch until his death in 1913 and H.W. Lee afterwards, were anti-Germans. With Hyndman as the founding father of the SDF, Blatchford as the most popular socialist journalist in Britain, and the control of two papers, the anti-Germans were assured of a platform. The New Age, another privately owned socialist journal, also gave support to demands for a big Navy and a citizen army.⁵⁷

In mid-1904 Blatchford began to write articles in the Clarion with titles such as 'Can England be Invaded? Forewarned is Forearmed', 'The German Menace', and 'England's Foolhardy Neglect in the North Sea'.⁵⁸ In these he warned that invasion by Germany was not only possible, but probable, and that 'if we want to keep our Empire, our wealth, our liberty, *our* honour, we have got to pay for them and to fight for them. That which is won by the sword must be kept by the sword.'⁵⁹ In 1905 Hyndman followed Blatchford and put forward his case for the defence of England. 'The bourgeois French Republic is progressive, undoubtedly,' he wrote. 'The bourgeois English Monarchy (Ltd) is less progressive.... But to permit the people of either France or England to come under the Kaiser's mailed fist would appear to me un-Socialistic as well as unpatriotic.'⁶⁰ He was contemptuous of the German socialists and people (he was to become increasingly so). 'Our forefathers,' he wrote, 'to whom we English owe our enfranchisement, from tyranny like that which they [the German people] submit to meekly, risked their liberty, their lives, and all that men hold dear, rather than exist under the conditions Germans are content with to-day.'⁶¹

56 Clarion, 12 Jan 1906, 12 June 1908.

57 See for example, New Age, 6 June 1907 and 15 Feb 1908.

58 Clarion, 10, 17, 24 June 1906.

59 Clarion, 3, 10 June 1904.

60 Justice, 27 May 1905 in Chushichi Tsuzuki, H.M. Hyndman and British Socialism, Oxford UP, 1961, p.200.

61 Justice, 12 Aug 1905.

Rather surprisingly it was Blatchford rather than Hyndman who suggested reasons for the cause of perceived German expansionism. He argued that Germany, with its growing population and inability to grow its own food, with the desire for a proper seaboard, and the German ruling class's belief in German superiority, was forced to look outwards.⁶² Hyndman usually simply referred to Prussian aggression as shown by its wars with Denmark, Austria and France in the decade around unification.⁶³ The core of Blatchford and Hyndman's arguments as to why socialists should defend Britain, the biggest imperial power in the world, was that Britain allowed more political liberty than Germany. Blatchford's 'case for efficient national defence' was that, 'There is no nation in the world so free as Britain. There is no nation where the subject has an equal liberty of speech and action. I believe and feel very strongly that with all Britain's faults there is no country so good to live in as our own.'⁶⁴ Hyndman similarly argued that

it is beyond all doubt that our liberties are far ahead of any that the German people possess.... [T]he strengthening of German militarism on the Continent must be harmful to democracy and Social-Democracy everywhere; and ... Great Britain, with all her faults and weaknesses, is the only nation which can, in conjunction with others, frustrate the aggression for which Germany is all but ready.⁶⁵

In the same article, Hyndman cited the right of asylum as evidence of Britain's liberty, though the tone of the article was such that it showed his anti-foreigner feeling, since he wrote that it 'astound[ed]' him that foreigners in the SDF should oppose an adequate Navy in the land that had granted them asylum.⁶⁶ A.M. Thompson also argued, 'My sober conviction is that our forefathers and our living champions of democracy have won for us, the inhabitants of Great Britain, certain rights and liberties which it would be worth the lives of all the Socialists in the kingdom to defend.' And he summed up the contentions of the anti-Germans (himself included) as

(1) that the maintenance of the British Empire is to the interest of every Briton and every lover of liberty; (2) that existing defences are inadequate; (3) that the burden of defence should be shared by all good citizens; (4) that their training as citizen soldiers would be beneficial to the physique of our people; and (5) that the substitution of a citizen army for a professional soldiery would complete the transfer of power from aristocracy to democracy.⁶⁷

62 Clarion, 17 Feb 1905, 21 Aug 1908.

63 Justice, 14 March 1908; H.M. Hyndman, Further Reminiscences, Macmillan, 1912, p.396.

64 Clarion, 16 April 1909.

65 Justice, 29 May 1909.

66 See p.143 below for further attacks on foreign anti-militarists.

67 Clarion, 8 March 1907.

It was through the idea of a citizen army that the anti-Germans added a radical edge to their demands for the defence of Britain. Again this was in line with the policy of the Second International since 1889 and reaffirmed at Stuttgart in 1907, as supporters of the citizen army pointed out to their opponents.⁶⁸ The official history of the SDF recorded three decades later that 'it was doubtful if any aspect of [the SDF's] work in this country was ever so misunderstood and consistently misinterpreted and misrepresented.'⁶⁹ In 1908, in response to Haldane's Territorial Army Bill, Will Thorne, the SDF's sole MP (elected for West Ham South under Labour Party auspices), introduced a Citizen Army Bill to the Commons. It proposed that 'every male subject domiciled in the United Kingdom shall be liable to military training', except those 'following the sea as a profession or occupation', 'persons unfit physically', and 'those who have a fixed conscientious objection to using arms'. Conscientious objectors would be trained for 'ambulance work, or other non-combatant duties'. No provision was made for absolutist objection, except up to twelve months imprisonment with hard labour, with no relief from liability to service.⁷⁰ The SDF attempted to reinforce their arguments for a citizen army by linking it to an English revolutionary democratic tradition.⁷¹ Thus W.H. Humphreys quoted Tom Paine, who, he argued, had shown that 'a nation which desired its liberty must be prepared to defend it by armed force, and that Quakerism simply placed humanity at the mercy of despots.'⁷² Harry Quelch had argued that the unarmed nation was a temptation to 'some mighty brigand power' and 'thus an unarmed nation cannot be free ... An armed nation, on the contrary is a guarantee of individual liberty, of social freedom, and of national independence.' These were English ideals cherished by socialists, and could be promoted through a citizen army 'by the inculcation of true patriotism and of international co-operation and interdependence'.⁷³ Alongside this, the SDF played on the traditional English dislike of standing armies, using the slogan 'No standing army; no military caste; no military law; but every man a citizen and every citizen trained and capable of bearing arms at

68 See for example, *Justice*, 10 Nov 1906 and 29 Oct 1910.

69 H.W. Lee and E. Archbold, *Social-Democracy in Britain*, SDF, 1935, p.194.

70 Lee and Archbold, *Social-Democracy in Britain*, pp.280-281, 282.

71 In France, Jaurès' proposals for *L'armée nouvelle* could more easily be linked with a native revolutionary tradition, see Weinstein, *Jean Jaurès*, pp.135-137.

72 W.H. Humphreys (ex-private, Royal Scots), *The Case for Universal Military Training as Established in Australia*, Twentieth Century Press, 1912, p.1. The SDF's foremost advocate of the citizen army idea, Robert Edmondson, also subtitled his name with his rank of sergeant-major, see for example *An Exposition and Exposure of Haldane's Territorial Forces Act, 1907*, Twentieth Century Press, 1908, and *Justice*, 8 Feb 1908.

73 Harry Quelch, *Social Democracy and the Armed Nation*, Twentieth Century Press, 1900, pp.4, 11.

need.'⁷⁴ As a historian of patriotism has remarked, 'Arms thus became the badge of liberty in the old, archaic way.'⁷⁵ 'In all past ages,' Quelch wrote, 'the right to carry arms has been the distinguishing mark of a free man.'⁷⁶

The citizen army proposal could tenuously be presented as a socialist measure in defence of liberty. However, Blatchford and Hyndman became increasingly vocal in their extended demands for national defence, moving out from the socialist movement into the capitalist press. In September 1909, Blatchford went to Germany to report on German army manoeuvres for the Daily Mail. He returned an advocate of conscription. During the campaign preceding the General Election of January 1910 he wrote a series of ten articles for the Daily Mail which called for two years' compulsory military service and an additional £50 million to be spent on the Royal Navy.⁷⁷ While the vast majority of the left, including Justice, dissociated themselves from Blatchford, Hyndman, invited him to chair an election meeting in Burnley.⁷⁸ In July 1910, Hyndman in a letter to the Conservative Morning Post, announced his support for increased expenditure to maintain British Naval superiority. To pay for this he demanded that the government borrow £100 million.⁷⁹ It was this turning outside the socialist movement for a platform that brought down a storm of condemnation on Blatchford and Hyndman. Hyndman was unperturbed. He replied that if to call for a bigger Navy 'is to be a jingo, then I am a jingo; if this is to be a bourgeois, then I am a bourgeois; if this is to be an opponent of organised Socialist opinion, then I am an opponent of organised Socialist opinion'.⁸⁰ On 8 September, a further letter from him appeared in the Morning Post. Blatchford responded to criticism with an article entitled 'An Outburst of Rabid Jingoism' in which he wrote that 'strange as it may seem to busy people fed on Labour speeches and radical newspapers, England has good points ... We hear too much of her faults and of her merits not enough.'⁸¹ He became more concerned about the empire as time passed, and noted his growing isolation:

The imperial situation is very much more serious than I have said. We shall lose India, we shall lose Egypt, we shall very likely lose South Africa; we shall be lucky

74 Lee and Archbold, Social-Democracy in Britain, p.198. Edmondson, An Exposition and Exposure, pp.1-3, argued that a citizen army, unlike a standing army or the Territorial Army, could not be used to aid of the civil power.

75 J.H. Grainger, Patriotisms 1900-1939, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986, pp.300-301.

76 Clarion, 20 Oct 1905.

77 R.J.Q. Adams and Philip P. Poirier, The Conscription Controversy in Great Britain, 1900-18, Macmillan, Basingstoke and London, 1987, p.20. In 1912 Blatchford turned against conscription after soldiers were used to break strikes, Clarion, 1, 22 Nov 1912.

78 Newton, British Labour, European Socialism and the Struggle for Peace, p.213.

79 For the letter see Justice, 20 Aug 1910.

80 Justice, 3 Sept 1910.

81 Clarion, 30 Sept 1910.

if we keep Australia. These things are coming. I see no sign that our people will rise to the occasion. You see the Labour Party have become the tools of the Liberals; and the whole of the British democracy are peace-at-any-pricers.... It cuts me off from the Socialist Parties. I am agen 'em. They will wreck The Empire. I'm agen that.⁸²

The Anti-Militarists

The vast majority of the left opposed increased armaments and anti-Germanism. The ILP passed anti-militarist resolutions annually at its conferences, with very few, if any, dissenters. Only five delegates voted against the anti-militarist resolution at the 1910 conference, after G. Moore Bell, a delegate from Woolwich, had declared that 'it was their business to say that they would not allow a reactionary nation to lead the other nations of the world captive.' Another delegate asked whether Bell was not inspired by the vested interests of Woolwich. Yet Bell did not receive the support of all seven Woolwich delegates.⁸³ In 1911 only three delegates voted against the anti-militarist resolution, in 1912 and 1913 it was passed unanimously, and in 1914 there were again three dissenters.⁸⁴ There is evidence that Clarion readers did not support Blatchford's position. After the Daily Mail had published Blatchford's articles, Lord Northcliffe, the paper's proprietor, wrote to the right-wing editor of the National Review that 'the man is a noble fellow because it has almost killed his "Clarion". The circulation has already gone down by half I believe.'⁸⁵ Few anti-militarist letters were published in the Clarion, but it would appear that this was a result of editorial decisions, for Thompson remarked after one of his articles that 'all who have written so far are opposed to my views'.⁸⁶ Blatchford wrote that 'my article on the German danger, has, as I expected, brought me a good many letters from well-meaning Socialists who do not understand.'⁸⁷ When such letters were published, the editor had a tendency to dissect them, answering them point by point.⁸⁸ In a Clarion referendum, readers voted 2,485 to 1,786 against compulsory military service.⁸⁹ It is in the SDF/BSP that the issue had the most repercussions, because while the ILP was united in hostility to militarism and the Clarion had no organisational framework, Clarion groups being largely recreational, the SDF/BSP witnessed real differences between fairly evenly balanced forces. Justice had to

82 Blatchford Letters, MS. F 920 5 B27, vol. 2, f15, 28 Nov 1910, Manchester Central Library.

83 ILP, Conference Report, 1910, pp.66-68.

84 ILP, Conference Reports, 1911, p.95; 1912, p.96; 1913, p.103; 1914, pp.120-121.

85 A.J.A. Morris, The Scaremongers, p.213.

86 Clarion, 8 March 1907.

87 Clarion, 7 Aug 1908.

88 See for example, Clarion, 1 July 1904.

89 Clarion, 28 Jan 1910. The Clarion claimed 70,000 readers at the time.

report that 'rain interfered ... to mar the success' of their Trafalgar Square demonstration in favour of a citizen army in April 1907. A month later it admitted that there was a 'very considerable apathy' around the citizen army agitation.⁹⁰

The ILP prided itself on its expressions of internationalism. From its foundation in 1893 it had welcomed fraternal delegates from Europe. At the founding conference, the German socialist Eduard Bernstein had addressed the delegates in response to Tillett's attack on Continental socialists.⁹¹ In 1896 the Congress of the International was held in London, and delegates from the ILP attended all the subsequent congresses. Hardie, for example, attended London in 1896, Amsterdam in 1904, Copenhagen in 1910 and Basle in 1912.⁹² Larger ILP branches organised continental trips. The fifth trip organised by Bradford ILP unfortunately had to be cancelled, since it was planned for Saturday 15 August 1914.⁹³ May Day was celebrated each year as an international occasion, marked by 'Gleaner', in Labour Leader in 1900 with a poem expressing the sentimentality of the occasion:

'Neath the Red Flag unfurled,
All over the world,
One people in various lands
Are uniting to-day
In a welcome to May,
With thought interlinking of hands [*sic*].⁹⁴

But the ILP saw internationalism as a plurality of patriotisms. Hence, while May Day was a celebration of international working-class solidarity, it was held firmly within the national tradition, using much that was symbolic of England.⁹⁵ Glasier explained that

internationalism does not involve the extinction of nations, but the brotherhood of nations. Nations are forms of social organisation, and national or patriotic sentiment is an expression of social emotion.... It would almost seem to have been decreed, since the foundation of society, that each community, small or large, must, in the interests of race progress, preserve its individual characteristics - its blood, its language, its customs, and its beliefs.⁹⁶

This was a rejection of the idea that the workers have no country, and it meant that workers within a territory did have a national interest in common with their ruling

90 Justice, 27 April, 25 May 1907.

91 ILP, Conference Report, 1893, p.5. See p.53 above.

92 Kenneth O. Morgan, Keir Hardie: Radical and Socialist, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1975, p.180.

93 Bradford ILP, Yearbook 1914, ILP, Bradford, 1914, p.9.

94 Labour Leader, 5 May 1900.

95 See pp.43-44, 62 above.

96 Labour Leader, 26 Oct 1910.

class. Thus the ILP believed in national defence, and did not argue for the abolition of the army or navy. They argued instead that without increases the British armed forces were adequate for the defence of the nation. Thus, in criticism of Hyndman and Blatchford in 1908, the editor of Labour Leader introduced an article by Hardie claiming that 'so far as any one man may claim to speak for the British movement, Mr. Hardie is entitled to do so,' since not only was he a pioneer of socialism and labourism, and in touch with the rank and file, but also 'he loves his country with a warmth and sincerity which glows through all the fire of his agitator's heart'.⁹⁷ In the Commons, William Brace argued for a reduction in the Navy 'as more in consonance with the best interests of the nation'.⁹⁸

The ILP attempted to claim a true patriotism for themselves. The corollary to this was that the militarists were not real patriots. This could be argued in one of two ways. First it could be shown that the most vocal 'patriots' were shareholders in armaments companies. This had been done to a small extent during the Boer War, and Hardie had written a series of five articles in 1903 called 'Patriotism and Profit'.⁹⁹ In 1913 Fenner Brockway, editor of the Labour Leader and J.T. Walton Newbold, a Quaker, set to work uncovering the existence of what they claimed was an armaments ring. They published lists of shareholders in arms companies who were also leaders of the conscription and Navy pressure groups, MPs and high-ranking officers in the army and navy.¹⁰⁰ Philip Snowden's longest Commons speech ever was based on Newbold's research,¹⁰¹ but the national press ignored this 'Dynamite!' and Churchill refused to answer questions on it.¹⁰² Second, it could be claimed that the militarists were 'bastard patriots' since their claims to be British were doubtful. Labour Leader had used this approach during the Boer War, claiming it was a war for Jews.¹⁰³ C.H. Norman wrote an article in The New Age 'exposing' this 'Bastard Patriotism'.¹⁰⁴ 'The time has come,' he wrote

for all lovers of the honour of their country to stand fast against the dangerous militarist agitation now being engineered by a reptile Press, out-of-work generals, non-combatant Whig lawyers, and a corrupt Court. The object of these men, few of whom are Englishmen, is to deprive the citizens of this country of their liberties.

He then 'exposed' Lord Rothschild as 'a Jew financier', Ralph Blumenfeld, editor of

97 Labour Leader, 14 Aug 1908.

98 HC Debates, 4:170, 700-702, 5 March 1907.

99 See Labour Leader, 18 July, 1, 8 and 29 Aug, 5 Sept 1903.

100 See Labour Leader, 22 May, 5 and 12 June 1913; J.T. Walton Newbold, The War Trust Exposed, National Labour Press, Manchester and London, n.d. 1913.

101 It filled twenty-two columns of Parliamentary Debates. Cross, Snowden, p.131.

102 Labour Leader, 5 June 1913.

103 See pp.81-82 above.

104 The New Age, 4 March 1909.

the Daily Express as an 'American gentleman with a German name', the Daily Mail as Irish-owned and edited, and Leo Maxse as 'another Jingo with an "all-British" name'. The author of the popular play An Englishman's Home he revealed as having 'the truly English name of' Du Maurier.¹⁰⁵ 'The British workman,' he concluded, 'is being deluded by this unholy alliance of Jew financiers, American and Irish journalists and peers, into the belief that Conscription is a worthy ideal.'¹⁰⁶ The combined effect of these two approaches was to show that militarism was the result of both sectional and foreign interests.

The ILP also made use of the widespread feeling that compulsory military service, whether it be conscription or a citizen army, was alien to the traditions of England. In 1904 the Royal Commission on Army Reform recommended the introduction of compulsory military service; this, Labour Leader declared, 'has a sound as hateful to British tradition as slavery.'¹⁰⁷ A month later Harry Snell replied to advocates who argued that since every European country had conscription so should Britain. 'Britain is different from every other country in Europe ...' he wrote. 'Britain is an island and seems to have been meant by nature for the home of free institutions.'¹⁰⁸ It was in these terms that ILP conferences declared their opposition to conscription. Glasier at the 1907 conference condemned the SDF's citizen army proposal as 'rank re-actionism in this country where we had inherited freedom from compulsory service from our fathers'.¹⁰⁹ And MacDonald's resolution as chairman in 1909 argued that 'the immunity from compulsory Military Service which our nation enjoys, is one of its greatest heritages of freedom.'¹¹⁰ In the autumn of 1913 the ILP ran a 'No Conscription Campaign' in which over two hundred demonstrations and meetings were held.¹¹¹ The climax was a demonstration at Kingsway Hall at which Jaurès spoke for French Socialists, Molkenbuhr for German Social-Democrats, and Vandervelde for Belgian Socialists. The French author Anatole France also spoke.¹¹² This internationalism was combined with radical patriotism, since an anti-conscription leaflet was entitled 'Resist the Foreign Yoke of Conscription!'¹¹³ It

105 It was of course a Cornish name.

106 This article provoked two pieces of correspondence. In The New Age, 11 March 1909, Ethel M. Harter, who wrote the song 'A Call to Arms', and whom Norman had 'exposed' as having the maiden name de Fonblanque, wrote that her family had come over before 1750 as Huguenot refugees. 'X' urged that the article be reprinted as a leaflet.

107 Labour Leader, 3 June 1904.

108 Labour Leader, 8 July 1904.

109 ILP, Conference Report, 1907, pp.63-64.

110 ILP, Conference Report, 1909, p.84. The same resolution was passed at the Labour Party conference that year.

111 ILP, Conference Report, 1914, pp.21-22.

112 Newton, British Labour, European Socialism and the Struggle for Peace, pp.310-311.

113 ILP 'Coming-of-Age' Campaign leaflet, no. 7, Manchester and London, n.d. 1914.

urged 'Let us Preserve the Civic Character of the British Nation', declaring

the spirit of militarism is alien to the traditions of the British race. The British nation is the freest of all European nations; it has spread its language, its trade, its political institutions afar over the world as no other nation has done - *and the British nation has no conscription or compulsory military training!*¹¹⁴

To argue that imperialism had been more successful the British voluntarist way was an unusual argument for socialists to use.

The SDF/BSP was most divided over the issue of anti-militarism and anti-Germanism. It did not split however until a year and a half into the First World War. This was largely because the anti-militarist opposition were also foremost in the left unity campaign that led to the formation of the BSP in 1911.¹¹⁵ In the years up to Hyndman's approach to the capitalist press there had been opposition to his anti-Germanism. Letters responded to every anti-German utterance in Justice. Zelda Kahan, a leader of the anti-militarist opposition, responded to Hyndman's outbursts during the Naval Scare of 1909 by accusing him of allying himself with 'the jingo naval scaremongers', and Hackney Central branch condemned 'the anti-German attitude of Hyndman, Blatchford and Justice'.¹¹⁶ But it was after Hyndman's letter to the Morning Post in July 1910 that the opposition became more organised and the debate more bitter. At the 1911 SDF conference, Kahan moved a resolution calling for the party to 'combat with utmost energy, the demands for increased armaments'. Quelch responded with an amendment calling for an adequate navy and a citizen army. The conference delegates were evenly divided, 28 to 28. A branch vote was subsequently taken, with Quelch's amendment winning 47 to 33.¹¹⁷ The following year, at the first conference of the BSP, Quelch presented a paper on 'Socialism and Patriotism' in which he said the BSP 'were Internationalists, not Anti-Nationalists'. He argued that 'International Socialism claimed the fullest possible liberty for every individual nationality.' Therefore the nation had to be defended, even in the present under capitalism. W. Gallacher of Paisley responded that 'it was no use juggling with the word patriotism; they had to take it in its generally accepted meaning ... They should condemn all idea of patriotism and all idea of militarism, unless it took the form of shooting down those who exploited them.' Again Quelch won the vote, this time by 83 votes to 65.¹¹⁸ Quelch came top of the poll in the subsequent election for the executive, though Kahan and E.C. Fairchild were also elected as internation-

114 Original emphasis.

115 Kendall, The Revolutionary Movement in Britain, p.55.

116 Justice, 17 April, 1 May 1909.

117 Kendall, The Revolutionary Movement in Britain, p.54.

118 BSP, Conference Report, 1912, pp.20-22.

alists. The conflict now took place on the executive committee. On 14 December 1912, Kahan moved a resolution which was passed by one vote declaring that 'so far as the workers are concerned there is nothing to choose between German and British Imperialism and aggression. The Executive Committee of the [BSP] dissociates itself from propaganda for increased naval expenditure.' The resolution bound all members of the executive to this decision.¹¹⁹ Victor Fisher, virulently anti-German, then resigned from the executive. In a letter to Justice explaining his action, he complained of 'a violent and bitter anti-nationalism' and indulged in racism aimed at his opponents:

I am persuaded that if we as a Party - self-named the BRITISH Socialist Party - permit it to be believed among the general public that Socialism stands for treason against the national security, and that, moreover, such a policy is largely inspired by comrades alien in blood and race, we may bid a long farewell to any hope of influencing national opinion in the direction of that social regeneration of which Socialism is the only possible expression.¹²⁰

One of Fisher's supporters, H.J. Brister, added to the xenophobia; seeming to have no understanding of internationalism, he wrote

no sane person will assert that you have not given the alien Socialists much more than their fair share of the columns of Justice.... I am unable to believe, even for a moment, that Miss Kahan has the interests of this country at heart in this German menace business: every action, every word, of hers breathes hatred of Britain and everything that is British - except its hospitality.¹²¹

On 15 February the executive suspended Kahan's resolution when two of the anti-militarist members were absent. Fisher, therefore, rescinded his resignation and Kahan resigned.¹²² At the conference that year a compromise was reached when Hyndman agreed not to prejudice the BSP by public expression of his views; the anti-militarists were beaten or did not stand for re-election to the executive. No clear position had been reached and the party remained divided.

* * * * *

On the eve of the Great War the vast majority of the British left supported the idea of national defence. Most did so because they believed that Britain, almost naturally, enjoyed greater political liberty than any other country, and was more democratic.

119 BSP, Conference Report, 1913, p.37.

120 Justice, 4 Jan 1913.

121 Justice, 11 Jan 1913.

122 Justice, 15 Feb 1913.

This involved a national self-deception, since no women had the vote, and neither did forty per cent of males.¹²³ But the democratic delusion was very strong; it did not matter that Germany had universal manhood suffrage. National myths can be stronger than facts. The larger part of this group believed, however, that there was no threat of invasion by Germany, that Britain's defences were adequate, and that any increase in armaments would threaten peace and thus reduce the safety of the nation. They sometimes argued this in terms of radical patriotism, and they argued that should Britain be in danger they would not oppose increased armaments. Those who believed there was a danger from Germany argued for more efficient home defence (which could include defence of the Empire), usually a citizen army and a bigger navy. Part of this group believed that patriotism was an essential part of socialism, which should be put to the forefront of their propaganda. This group was liable to use anti-foreigner statements against their critics. This meant that the attitude of the left to future wars would largely depend on their belief in the existence of a threat dangerous to the continued survival of Britain as a nation marked out by its inherent freedom, rather than on socialist principles.

123 Neal Blewett, 'The Franchise in the United Kingdom, 1885-1918,' Past and Present, no. 32, 1965, pp.27-56.

Chapter 7

The Left, Patriotism and the First World War 1914-1917

July and August 1914

Arthur Marwick has commented that 'prior to August 1914, ... war was widely expected as an eventual probability, but it was scarcely visualised at all as an immediate contingency. This explains why the breaking of war brought both a sense of long-sought release and an atmosphere of panic and untempered emergency.'¹ This was the experience of most European socialists. Only on 24 July did Huysman, permanent secretary of the Second International, telegraph members of the International Socialist Bureau to inquire whether a meeting should be organised. The ISB met on 29-30 July; it decided to discuss 'The Proletariat and the War' at the forthcoming congress in Paris on the 9 August.² On 27 July, the German Social-Democrat leader, Ebert, said to a friend, 'They look too much on the black side ... I'm sure it's nonsense. There will be no war.'³ About the same date W.C. Anderson wrote his editorial for that week's Labour Leader. Published on 30 July it declared:

The first shots have been fired between Austria and Servia, but I am not certain even now, that the Big Powers of Europe and the financial interests behind them will allow the struggle to be carried very far.... Despite all the signs to the contrary, there will, I believe, be no war.

This meant that there was very little time for member parties to carry out the agreed resolutions of the International. 'In the case of a threat of an outbreak of war,' the Stuttgart resolution of 1907 declared,

it is the duty of the working classes and their parliamentary representatives in the countries taking part, fortified by the unifying activity of the International Bureau, to do everything to prevent the outbreak of war by whatever means seem to them most effective.⁴

British socialists had been foremost advocates of a general strike against war; it had been Hardie who was joint sponsor of such a resolution at the 1910 Copenhagen Congress. The Labour Party in 1912 approved an investigation into the practicalities

1 The Deluge: British Society and the First World War, second edition, Macmillan, Basingstoke and London, 1991, p.69.

2 Georges Haupt, Socialism and the Great War: The Collapse of the Second International, Clarendon, Oxford, 1973, pp.187, 199. It had been intended to hold the congress in Vienna.

3 James Joll, The Second International 1889-1914, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1955, p.162.

4 Joll, Second International, p.198.

of a general strike, though the ILP had been forced to drop the idea due to trade union indifference.⁵ Nevertheless, the vast majority of the left were united in the last few days of July and the first few days of August in their desire to demonstrate to preserve peace.⁶ Francis Johnson, ILP secretary, telegraphed the fifty largest ILP branches, instructing them to organise demonstrations.⁷ The British Section of the ISB called a demonstration against war on 2 August in Trafalgar Square. According to the Daily Herald, 20,000 people listened to Hardie, Henderson, Lansbury, Hyndman, Thorne, Marion Phillips, Cunninghame Graham, Margaret Bondfield and Robert Williams, and passed the following resolution:

We protest against any step being taken by the Government of this country to support Russia, either directly or in consequence of an undertaking with France, as being not only offensive to the political traditions of the country but disastrous to Europe, and declare that as we have no interest, direct or indirect, in the threatened quarrels which may result from the action of Serbia, the Government of Great Britain should rigidly decline to engage in war, but should confine itself to efforts to bring about peace as speedily as possible.⁸

As Mary Hamilton wrote later, 'Russia was the focal point; it was against being dragged into war in support of Russia that they thundered.... Serbia was the arch villain of the piece. Behind her stood Russia, and Czarist Russia was a far more fearsome apparition than Germany as we knew it.'⁹ The next day, MacDonald replied to the foreign secretary's speech in the Commons. MacDonald was probably representative of the majority of the British left on 3 August. 'I want to say this to the House, and say it without equivocation,' he said

If the right hon. Gentleman had come here to-day and told us that our country is in danger, I do not care what party he appealed to, we would be with him and behind him. If this is so, we will vote him what money he wants. Yes, and we will go further. We will offer him ourselves if the country is in danger. But he has not persuaded my hon. Friends who co-operate with me that it is, and I am perfectly certain, when his speech gets into cold print to-morrow, he will not persuade a large section of the country. If the nation's honour were in danger we would be with him.... If the right. hon Gentleman could come and tell us that a small European

5 Douglas J. Newton, British Labour, European Socialism and the Struggle for Peace 1889-1914, Clarendon, Oxford, 1985, chapter 10.

6 Though Blatchford wrote to Thompson that 'I shall write today a cautious article counselling peace ... but I do not think really that European peace is possible until Germany has been defeated and humiliated. Also I realize the great possibility that we shall be at war with Germany before the Clarion comes out. And I hope we are, Yours Bob'. Blatchford Letters, MS F 920 5 B27, vol. 2, f25, 47 August 1914, Manchester Central Library.

7 Newton, British Labour and the Struggle for Peace, p.327. Labour Leader, 6 Aug 1914 reported that forty-three anti-war demonstrations were held.

8 Daily Herald, 3 Aug 1914; Peter Stansky (ed.), The Left and War: The British Labour Party and World War I, Oxford UP, New York and London, 1969, p.84.

9 Mary Agnes Hamilton, Remembering My Good Friends, Jonathan Cape, 1944, pp.66-67.

nationality like Belgium is in danger, and assure us he is going to confine the conflict to that question, then we would support him. What is the use of talking about coming to the aid of Belgium, when, as a matter of fact, you are engaging in a whole European war which is not going to leave the map of Europe in the position it is in now. The right hon. Gentleman said nothing about Russia. We want to know about that. We want to try to find out what is going to happen, when it is all over, to the power of Russia in Europe, and we are not going to go blindly into this conflict without having some sort of a rough idea as to what is going to happen.¹⁰

These were not socialist objections to the coming war. They involved judgements about the situation based on the idea of the nation. Within the next thirty-six hours the situation had changed in such a way that most of the left were satisfied that all MacDonald's objections had been answered. Germany had violated Belgian neutrality to which Britain had treaty obligations. It was widely felt that not to have responded would have damaged the honour of Britain, and placed Britain in danger. This was combined with massive popular support for the war. On 1 August 1914, the principal recruiting station in London recruited eight men. On 4 August it took twenty policemen twenty minutes to help the officer in charge through the gathered crowds.¹¹ The East London Advertiser reported that,

Patriotism in the East End is everywhere most marked.... Even at Bow, where for years the Socialists have zealously tried to stifle national sentiment and patriotism by decrying everything British, the unusual sight has been witnessed of bands of boys parading the streets headed by the Union Jack, singing patriotic songs.¹²

Most of the British left simply gave way to this massive popular pressure and their own basically patriotic feelings and supported the war. On 5 August the Labour Party executive met and backed MacDonald's sentiments of 3 August by eight to four; a meeting of the Parliamentary Labour Party the same evening rejected MacDonald's suggestion of abstention in the war credits vote. MacDonald then resigned as chairman.¹³ The Labour Party had committed itself to supporting the war effort. On 24 August the Labour Party and TUC agreed to an industrial truce; on the 29 August the Labour Party agreed to an electoral truce and to aid in raising an army through the Parliamentary Recruiting Committee. The BSP executive, including its anti-militarist members, signed a manifesto declaring that 'the Party naturally desires to see the prosecution of the war to a speedy and successful issue.'¹⁴ Of the larger

10 Stansky (ed.), The Left and War, p.58.

11 R.J.Q. Adams and Philip P. Poirier, The Conscription Controversy in Great Britain, 1900-18, Macmillan, Basingstoke and London, 1987, p.59.

12 8 Aug 1914, in Julia Bush, Behind the Lines: East London Labour 1914-1919, Merlin, 1984, p.36.

13 Newton, British Labour and the Struggle for Peace, pp.332-333.

14 Justice, 17 Sept 1914.

socialist parties only the ILP stood out against the war. The ILP executive's manifesto declared, desperately:

Out of the darkness and the depth we hail our working-class comrades of every land. Across the roar of guns, we send sympathy and greeting to the German Socialists. They have laboured unceasingly to promote good relations with Britain, as we with Germany. They are no enemies of ours, but faithful friends.

In forcing this appalling crime upon the nations, it is the rulers, the diplomats, the militarists who have sealed their doom. In tears of blood and bitterness the greater democracy will be born.... Long live Freedom and Fraternity! Long live International Socialism!¹⁵

There are major difficulties in attempting to classify the attitudes of both parties and individuals to the First World War. As Marwick has pointed out, 'it is scarcely possible to draw a rigid line between pro-war and anti-war elements.'¹⁶ Arthur Henderson was a supporter of the war but also a member of the General Council of the Union of Democratic Control until he joined Asquith's coalition government.¹⁷ MacDonald was a founder of the UDC, prominent in the ILP, the most bitterly-hated opponent of the war, yet in a letter to the Mayor of Leicester *declining* to appear on recruiting platforms, he wrote:

Victory ... must be ours. England is not played out. Her mission is to be accomplished.... We cannot go back now, nor can we turn to the right or the left. We must go straight through. History will in due time apportion the praise and blame, but the young men of the country must, for the moment settle the immediate issue.... Whoever may be in the wrong men so inspired will be in the right.... To such men it is enough to say "England has need of you".... They will gather to her aid.¹⁸

MacDonald's biographer has commented that 'politically, his position was only a hair's breadth away from Henderson'.¹⁹ It was this sort of complication that could lead Robert Williams, a leader of the Transport Workers and a socialist, to write a pamphlet in which he declared 'I am well-nigh unable to determine my own attitude.'²⁰ In effect opponents of the war were largely defined by their enemies.

15 Labour Leader, 13 Aug 1914. The majority of German socialists, had they been able to read this message, would not have been very receptive to it, for they too supported their own nation. See F.L. Carsten, War against War: British and German Radical Movements in the First World War, Batsford, 1982, pp.12-18; and Dieter Groh, 'The "Unpatriotic Socialists" and the State,' Journal of Contemporary History, vol. I, no. 4, 1966, pp.151-177.

16 Arthur Marwick, 'Working-Class Attitudes to the First World War,' Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History, no. 13, 1966, p.9.

17 Marvin Swartz, The Union of Democratic Control in British Politics during the First World War, Clarendon, Oxford, 1971, pp.147-148.

18 Philip Snowden, An Autobiography Volume One 1864-1919, Ivor Nicholson and Watson, 1934, p.364.

19 David Marquand, Ramsay MacDonald, Jonathan Cape, 1977, p.180.

20 Un-Common Sense about the War, Herald pamphlet no. 4, n.d., p.2.

MacDonald's resignation of the chairmanship of the Labour Party marked him off as an opponent of the war in the eyes of supporters of the war. John Hodge at the evening meeting of the PLP on 5 August bluntly stated the choices before socialists: 'either we were for our country or we were against it.'²¹ The war, being an extreme event, presented moderates with difficulties they were unwilling to face.

The Pro-War Left

Historians of the British left agree that it was simple patriotism that determined the majority of the left's support for the First World War.²² Contemporary socialist opinion saw this as unexpected. Fenner Brockway, editor of Labour Leader, felt himself 'facing the shock of betrayal', and David Kirkwood, a young shop steward on the Clyde, saw that 'within a week, the so-called "international solidarity of labour" was exploded by the force of national patriotism.'²³ However, the left in the decades up to 1914 had constructed a radical version of patriotism which accepted the idea of national defence, particularly for Britain, since they saw it as the natural home of democracy, liberty and free institutions. It was in the same terms as these that the pro-war left argued for support for the Government and nation in August 1914.

That is not to say that there was no traditional patriotism involved. Radical patriotism is still love of country and an acceptance of the notion of national identity. Thus M.A. Hamilton wrote of the Labour Party MPs, 'They were British citizens, first: only in second line members of a party,' and specifically of Henderson, 'He, like the majority of his colleagues, was, from now on, primarily an Englishman.'²⁴ The New Age also agreed with such sentiments: 'While our special concern is with the proletariat of our own country, it cannot be a matter of indifference to us what the fate of our own country itself may be,' it commented. 'We think it no shame to Socialists and Democrats to put patriotism to-day before their own particular propaganda.'²⁵ The more nationally-minded socialists could take this

21 Chris Wrigley, Arthur Henderson, GPC Books, Cardiff, 1990, p.77.

22 See for example, Ralph Miliband, Parliamentary Socialism, second edition, Merlin, 1972, p.43; James Hinton, Labour and Socialism: A History of the British Labour Movement 1867-1974, Wheatsheaf, Brighton, 1983, p.98; F.M. Leventhal, Arthur Henderson, Manchester UP, Manchester and New York, 1989, p.50.

23 Brockway, Inside the Left: Thirty Years of Platform, Press, Prison and Parliament, George Allen and Unwin, 1947, title of chapter six; David Kirkwood, My Life of Revolt, George G. Harrap, 1935, p.81. British anti-war socialists were not alone in this shock, Lenin believed that the newspaper carrying a report of the German Social-Democrats vote for war credits was a forgery published by the German general staff, Tony Cliff, Lenin Volume Two All Power to the Soviets, 4 volumes, Pluto, 1976, p.2.

24 M.A. Hamilton, Arthur Henderson, William Heinemann, 1938, p.96.

25 The New Age, 6 Aug 1914.

nation-before-party line further still. A.M. Thompson, editor of the Clarion and founding member of the super-patriotic Socialist National Defence Committee, pronounced that 'no interest of Party, Privilege or Capital must stand in the way of national security. The Nation gave, the Nation must give back: blessed be the name of the Nation.'²⁶

But this acceptance of 'my country, right or wrong' was combined with a deeply held belief that, according to the orthodoxies of British radical patriotism, Britain and its allies were in the right. Most importantly, from this point of view, was the fact that Germany was the aggressor. The violation of Belgium, 'that plucky little nation', according to Hyndman, echoing the majority view, was both the occasion of Britain's declaration of war and of the left's declaration of support.²⁷ And if this was the cause of war, it followed that Britain and its allies had 'clean hands'.²⁸ Second to this was a belief that Britain's independence would be threatened if Germany were not faced in battle. The whole executive of the BSP, anti-German and anti-militarist alike, had 'always maintained the right of nations to defend their national existence by force of arms.... The national freedom and independence of this country are threatened by Prussian militarism.'²⁹ J.R. Clynes, one of two ILP MPs who supported the war, later exaggerated the threat, but the feeling was the same, arguing that, with the German army over the borders of Belgium and France, 'the future of our country [was] actually in danger, the time for deliberation was past. Blame could be apportioned later; the immediate task was to save England from invasion.'³⁰ Third was a belief that, in fighting for Britain, the pro-war left was fighting for democracy and liberty. Blatchford called the war a war of 'the democracies of a continent against the tyranny of the sceptre and the sword.'³¹ J.H. Thomas implored young men, from recruiting platforms, 'If you love liberty as I love liberty and if you respect freedom as I respect freedom, then it is your duty immediately to come to your country's aid.'³² Henderson, speaking as retiring president of the Methodist National Brotherhood Movement, in September 1915, said of the members who had gone to fight, 'They had gone forth, not because they hated war less; they had gone under a deep sense of obligation, because they felt it to be their duty to stand by

26 Clarion, 4 June 1915.

27 Justice, 13 Aug 1914.

28 New Statesman, 8 Aug 1914; The Truth About the War Makers: A Reply to the Independent Labour Party Pamphlet Daily Chronicle pamphlet, n.d., introduction by Will Crooks, p.3. The ILP pamphlet was How the War Came, see pp.156, 157 below.

29 Justice, 17 Sept 1914.

30 J.R. Clynes, Memoirs 1869-1924, Hutchinson, 1937, p.179.

31 Clarion, 14 Aug 1914. The question of Tsarist Russia was largely ignored by the pro-war left.

32 Gregory Blaxland, J.H. Thomas: A Life for Unity, Frederick Muller, 1964, p.87.

national honour, public right, liberty, justice and free democracy.³³ Jessie Cockerline, a Bradford socialist, decided that

The sword is drawn and it is drawn in the cause of democracy, in the cause of liberty and honour and we must, each one of us, realise that it can never again be sheathed whilst the terror of the Kaiser's dreams of universal domination have the remote possibility of being realised.³⁴

If other socialists felt the same, they could reply to an advertisement in the Clarion:

DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS
versus
GERMAN 'KULTUR'
Which side are You on?
...
JOIN THE FELLOWSHIP COMPANY
of the Cheshires, and fight side by side
With SOCIALIST COMRADES

This was a 'Pals' company for socialists, organised by J. Hunter Watts, a member of Manchester Clarion Club and the BSP.³⁵ Thus support for the war could be accommodated with relative ease within the radical patriotism to which the majority of the left subscribed in 1914.

Some socialists were not satisfied with individual support for the war, and wished to see an organisation to consolidate this support and also to atone for the anti-war stance of the ILP and parts of the BSP. Hence in April 1915 the Socialist National Defence Committee was formed, largely by those socialists who, before the war, had argued for patriotism to be placed in the forefront of the propaganda for socialism. The war gave them their opportunity. The leading figure in the SNDC was Victor Fisher, who in early 1915 resigned from the BSP because of the anti-war attitude of its left-wing. Also involved were Blatchford and A.M. Thompson of the Clarion, the Labour MPs, G.H. Roberts, Stephen Walsh, George Barnes and George Wardle, the socialist author H.G. Wells and Bert Killip from the executive of the BSP.³⁶ The preoccupations of the SNDC are best shown in their own words, through the manifesto they issued on 1 September 1915. 'In this hour of national peril,' it explained

33 The Times, 21 Sept 1915, in Wrigley, Arthur Henderson, p.84.

34 Yorkshire Factory Times, 27 Aug 1914, in Keith Laybourn and Jack Reynolds, Liberalism and the Rise of Labour 1890-1918, Croom Helm, 1984, p.183.

35 Clarion, 23 July 1915.

36 Much of this section draws on Roy Douglas, 'The National Democratic Party and the British Workers' League,' Historical Journal, vol. XV, no. 3, 1972, pp.533-552, and J.O. Stubbs, 'Lord Milner and Patriotic Labour, 1914-1918,' English Historical Review, vol. 87, 1972, pp.717-754.

when the independence of peoples is brutally menaced and the established public law and liberties of Europe are ruthlessly violated, a handful of pseudo-Socialists in this country are breaking the national solidarity and weakening the national effort in the face of the enemy. It has become a duty for true British Socialists to expose and repudiate the errors of these dreamers. Some of them are extreme pacifists; some are aliens by birth, blood or sentiment; all of them are *consciously or unconsciously* the agents of German Kaiserdom, and traitors to the imperishable ideals of liberty and democracy which have united free Britain, independent Belgium and Republican France in an indissoluble and glorious alliance.

It went on to explain that 'Socialism expresses itself' internationally, but it cannot develop anti-nationally. It must evolve according to national temperament and national rights.³⁷ Thus the SNDC, like much of the left, believed that theirs was a true British socialism, but combined this with an intolerance towards aliens (mainly Russian Jews) who refused to support the war. With these it was possible to think one's self into alienness. The SNDC was formed out of sentiments that consisted of anti-German racism and general xenophobia. While many pro-war socialists differentiated between the German people and their ruling class, the super-patriots condemned the German people as a whole. An early example was a verse of thirty lines in *Clarion*, written by 'Bezique', entitled 'Kultur. A Definition'. The first six lines, which set the tone of the verse, were as follows:

It is homicide and thieving;
It is lying and deceiving;
It is slaughter - pity spurning,
And it means cathedral burning.
It is devilry applied;
It is damned infanticide ...³⁸

As the war progressed, this racism became more virulent. In March 1915 Blatchford urged a boycott of German goods after the war was over. By July, he was arguing that for this 'insatiable race of savages', 'organised race of spies', and 'race of treacherous homicidal robbers', 'something very near to the extermination of the German people' would be needed to keep the peace permanently.³⁹ George Barnes explained that 'we now know that we are not only fighting Prussian militarism, we are fighting a people with a "kink" in their mental and moral make-up.'⁴⁰ The SNDC played a full part in the internment of aliens agitation that followed the sinking of the *Lusitania*. The language of these socialist super-patriots was little different from that of traditional right-wing patriots such as Horatio Bottomley, who called

37 Socialists and the War: Manifesto of the Socialist National Defence Committee, 1915.

38 Clarion, 1 Jan 1915.

39 Clarion, 26 March, 16 July 1915.

40 Herald, 2 Dec 1916.

Germans 'an unnatural abortion, a hellish freak'.⁴¹ Even German socialism was condemned. The SNDC manifesto said it consisted of 'political immaturity and bureaucratic ideals'. A.M. Thompson called it 'essentially and primarily Prussian', and George Barnes said four million German socialists had backed barbarism.⁴²

The super-patriots soon made contact with the radical right. Lord Milner, who was chairman of the National Service League, made contact with Fisher, and was pleased by what he heard. He wrote to Lord Willoughby de Broke in October 1915 that 'the impression made upon my mind certainly was encouraging. I found these men intelligent, patriotic, and not at all narrow minded. They represent ... the essential patriotism of the working class.' Within a few months, Fisher was being paid £1660 per year by Milner's contacts.⁴³ In March 1916, the SNDC was reformed as the British Workers' League, now with an imperial, rather than national, outlook.

It is difficult to judge the strength of the super-patriotic group on the British left during the First World War. The Clarion's circulation dropped to 10,000 a week, because of its patriotism, A.M. Thompson believed.⁴⁴ Hyndman took only a small minority of the BSP into his new, unfortunately named, National Socialist Party. The British Citizen and Empire Worker, paper of the BWL, claimed a circulation of 30,000, and by the summer of 1917 the BWL claimed 154 branches.⁴⁵ It could also rely on the support of many prominent Labour politicians and financial support from the radical right. However, as war dragged on, casualty lists grew longer and conscription was imposed, the bulk of the labour movement moved closer to the ILP rather than to the BWL.⁴⁶

The Anti-War Left

The anti-war left was a small proportion of the left, and only a tiny minority when compared to the population as a whole. It must be remembered that the extent of anti-war feeling was not a static phenomenon. ILP branches witnessed some growth as they gathered around them Liberals who opposed the war and particularly conscription, and thus their own party. The City of London branch of the ILP grew from 65 members in August 1914 to 175 members in November 1916. The branch's annual report for the year ending February 1915 recorded that

41 Cate Haste, Keep the Home Fires Burning: Propaganda in the First World War, Allen Lane, 1977, p.126. See chapter 6 for the anti-alien agitation.

42 Clarion, 26 March 1915; Herald, 2 Dec 1916.

43 Stubbs, 'Lord Milner and Patriotic Labour,' pp.723, 726-727.

44 Robert Blatchford, My Eighty Years, Cassell, 1931, preface p.ix.

45 Douglas, 'The National Democratic Party and the British Workers' League,' p.536.

46 See below pp.178-180 for the later history of the BWL.

A new type of member has been attracted to us, who formerly held aloof owing to some minor differences. But the attractive force of the one party which has remained loyal to the principles of internationalism and Pacifism, which are also the principles of the only true civilization, of ideal Christianity, and of any Socialism which is more than a catch-word for street corners, has overcome all lesser doubts and hesitations.⁴⁷

The ILP was the only political party of any size that, as a whole, opposed the First World War.⁴⁸ Only two ILP MPs, Clynes and James Parker, supported the war effort. Only a handful of branches repudiated the executive's anti-war manifesto of August 1914. However there is evidence that a sizable minority felt 'some surge of Fatherland in their hearts,' as a delegate from Ilford explained to the 1915 conference in Norwich. The NAC declared at the same conference that 'such matters as enlistment and the urging of recruitment are matters for the individual conscience,' despite having recommended that branches take no part in the recruiting campaign.⁴⁹ The ILP always had much respect for the individual's liberty, but there was another reason for this freedom of action. Fenner Brockway estimated that one-fifth of the party membership had succumbed to patriotism, and figures given for Bradford ILP in Bradford Pioneer in February 1916 tend to support this claim. Of a total membership of 1,473, there were 461 'young men' in the branch. Of these, 113 were in the trenches, five were killed or missing, twelve were wounded or prisoners of war, and six were in the Navy.⁵⁰ In a strong branch of the ILP, therefore, before conscription, just under thirty per cent of those eligible, had opted to join the armed forces.

As already mentioned, the entire executive of the BSP had, in September 1914, issued a manifesto calling for victory for the allies. The same manifesto also accepted conditional participation in recruiting campaigns.⁵¹ However, fifteen out of the eighteen London branches demanded that the statement be withdrawn, and John Mclean wrote that 'it is our business as Socialists to develop a "class patriotism", refusing to murder one another for sordid world capitalism.'⁵² In order to keep the anti-war opposition divided, the pro-war leaders refused to sanction a national

47 Swartz, The UDC in British Politics, pp.99-102.

48 The Socialist Labour Party also opposed the war, but in 1914 had only 200 members. Among its leaders it lost only Johnny Muir, editor of its paper The Socialist, to patriotism. Raymond Challinor, The Origins of British Bolshevism, Croom Helm, 1977, pp.150-160.

49 ILP, Conference Report, 1915, pp.86-87, 11, 10.

50 Brockway, Inside the Left, p.47; Tony Jowitt, 'Philip Snowden and the First World War,' in Keith Laybourn and David James (eds.), Philip Snowden: The First Labour Chancellor of the Exchequer, Bradford Libraries, Bradford, 1987, pp.52-53.

51 Justice, 17 Sept 1914.

52 Walter Kendall, The Revolutionary Movement in Britain 1900-21 The Origins of British Communism, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969, pp.88-89.

conference for 1915, and a series of divisional conferences were held. These revealed a party almost evenly divided between support for and opposition to the war, but the anti-war group won a one seat majority on the executive.⁵³ Despite this, Justice remained outside their control, its editor, H.W. Lee, having declared in January 1915 that he 'wish[ed] it to be distinctly understood that in no case will I advocate a policy on the war in opposition to' victory for the allies.⁵⁴ This forced the anti-war group to publish its own paper, The Call, which first appeared in February 1916. The final battle came at the BSP conference in April 1916. In a test vote on holding the conference in private, to protect anti-war speakers from harassment or prosecution, the pro-war section led by Hyndman lost the vote 76 to 28. Hyndman then led his section out of the conference, while the anti-war delegates stood on chairs singing 'The Red Flag'.⁵⁵ The pro-war section subsequently left the BSP and formed the National Socialist Party.

Contemporary socialists and various historians have attempted to classify the various groups opposing the war. Generally they can be divided into four groups, though it is perhaps best to remember Lenin's classification of the largest group as 'confused and vacillating elements', since it takes into account the equivocal and shifting nature of most anti-war thought.⁵⁶ First there were those who opposed the war on political grounds, opposing the diplomacy that had led to the war, but opposing it within its own terms. This group included the non-socialist Union of Democratic Control. It was perhaps the most influential group among opponents of the war, simply because it offered ideas about how the war came, and how future wars could be prevented. Thus the City of London ILP resolved in November 1914

That the various I.L.P. branches, almost unanimous in condemnation of the war, are still vague as to the desired forms of peace. That the N.A.C. therefore issue a manifesto to the branches ... in order to bring about the adoption of certain essential principles of a lasting peace. That these principles, which shall be stated in the manifesto, should be on the lines of the four points of the Union of Democratic Control, with such modifications as the N.A.C. may think fit.⁵⁷

The main thrust of the UDC and its socialist supporters' argument was that secret

53 Kendall, Revolutionary Movement in Britain, pp.91-92.

54 Justice, 21 Jan 1915.

55 BSP, Conference Report, 1916, p.3.

56 This classification is based on Fenner Brockway, Socialism over Sixty Years: The Life of Jowett of Bradford (1864-1944), National Labour Press/George Allen and Unwin, 1946, p.131, and Inside the Left, p.52; Colin Cross, Philip Snowden, Barrie and Rockliff, 1966, p.135; Robert E. Dowse, Left in the Centre: The Independent Labour Party 1893-1940 1966, p.21; Jowitt, 'Snowden and the First World War,' pp.45-46. Kendall, Revolutionary Movement in Britain, p.97.

57 Swartz, The UDC During the First World War, p.90.

diplomacy had enabled the formation of alliances that had resulted in two armed camps facing each other, which meant that war could not be localised but spread across to western Europe. The solution was, therefore, the democratic (parliamentary) control of foreign policy.⁵⁸ The second group comprised pacifists and socialists influenced by Christianity. Included in this group were such individuals as George Lansbury, and groups such as the No-Conscription Fellowship. They shared a moral opposition to the war; as Clifford Allen, chairman of the NCF, explained at its first national convention in 1915, this diverse group shared 'one objection to conscription ... with intense fervour, and that was a belief in the sanctity of human life'.⁵⁹ The third and fourth groups saw the causes of the war in socialist terms: capitalist rivalries had resulted in war. As John Maclean explained,

even supposing Germany is to blame, the motive force is not the ambitions of the Kaiser ... but the profit of the plundering class in Germany.... Every interested person knows that Germany's easiest road of entry into France was by Belgium. Sir Edward Grey only had to wait till neutrality had been broken to seize a 'moral' excuse for Britain taking up arms. The real reason was, and is, that he and his class knew that war between British and German capitalism had to come sooner or later....⁶⁰

This was the line taken by the anti-war group in the BSP, the SLP and part of the ILP. However, the difference between the third and fourth groups was that only the fourth, a tiny minority around Maclean, believed the imperialist war should be turned into a civil war against their own ruling class, and thus supported the idea of revolutionary defeatism. Apart from this group and some absolutist pacifists, the rest of the anti-war left believed in national defence and therefore that an allied victory was necessary.

The UDC were absolutely clear on this. The first UDC pamphlet published, written by E.D. Morel, its leading figure, declared, 'This country is at war, and has for the moment one overwhelming preoccupation: to render safe our national inheritance.' This was stressed again: '*It is imperative that the war, once begun, should be prosecuted to a victory for our country.*' It called the victory of the allies 'a vital

58 See for example, ILP, How the War Came, Labour and War pamphlet no. 1, second edition, ILP, 1915; A. Fenner Brockway, Is Britain Blameless?, National Labour Press, Manchester and London, n.d. 1915; J. Ramsay MacDonald, War and the Workers: A Plea for Democratic Control, UDC pamphlet no. 8, n.d.

59 Arthur Marwick, Clifford Allen: The Open Conspirator, Oliver Boyd, Edinburgh and London, 1964, pp.24-25. For sympathetic responses to such Christian pacifism see Lansbury Papers, vol. 8, Letters to George Lansbury from Geraldine Cammell, J.H. Dadswell, 11 August 1918, and A.L. Pennell, 13 August 1918, BLPES.

60 Kendall, Revolutionary Movement in Britain, pp.88-89.

necessity', and explained that the policy of the UDC was that 'first and foremost we must be victorious.'⁶¹ In a later leaflet, the UDC stressed that it was 'NOT a stop the war organisation.'⁶² The ILP, too, wanted to see an allied victory. 'Obviously the war must be finished now,' its first pamphlet began, 'and, whatever may be the rights and the wrongs of its origin, a victory for German arms and the worst elements in German society which the war has put into authority, would bring political results to Europe which no one who loves peace and liberty could welcome.'⁶³ Keir Hardie told a meeting in his constituency within ten days of the British declaration of war that 'a nation at war must be united especially when its existence is at stake.... With the boom of the enemy's guns within earshot, the lads who have gone forth by sea and land to fight their country's battles must not be disheartened by any discordant note at home.... We must see the war through....'⁶⁴ Fred Jowett, chairman of the ILP, agreed with Hardie. Bluntly, he declared, 'I want this country to win. I want, as you want, to see the militarism of Germany killed.'⁶⁵ MacDonald, as an ILP delegate at the 1916 Labour conference, the first held in wartime, replied to a critic:

Mr. Sexton had said he did not want the Germans to win. Who did? Was there any man present who was so unutterably unfair as to believe that any of them wanted the Germans to win? Not at all.... If they had gone astray it was not because they wanted any mishap to befall our nation either as a political entity or as a spiritual expression of human needs and human endeavours.⁶⁶

Kirkwood, who walked out of an SLP meeting addressed by the pro-war editor of The Socialist shouting 'naw, naw, Joanie, that'll no dae, the workers have nae country. Ah'm feenished wi' ye,' subsequently joined the ILP.⁶⁷ He later addressed a meeting against the Munitions Act, in terms more equivocal than his previous outburst: 'Fellow engineers, the country is at war. The country must win. In order to win, we must throw our whole soul into the production of munitions.'⁶⁸ Likewise, E.C. Fairchild, a member of the anti-war group in the BSP, said the war 'imperils the future of socialism,' but 'all action should be rigorously avoided, calculated to

61 E.D. Morel, The Morrow of War, 1914, in Stansky (ed.), The Left and War, pp.88, 94-95, 101. Original emphasis.

62 'The Union of Democratic Control What It Is and What It Is Not,' UDC leaflet no. 14. Original emphases.

63 ILP, How the War Came, p.1.

64 Merthyr Pioneer, 14 Aug 1914, in Kenneth O. Morgan, Keir Hardie: Radical and Socialist, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1975, pp.266-267.

65 A speech in Bradford, 6 Sept 1914, quoted by Joseph Burgess, Bradford ILP president in an article explaining why he was joining the super-patriotic SNDC, Clarion, 9 July 1915.

66 Labour Party, Conference Report, 1916, p.101.

67 William Gallacher, Revolt on the Clyde: An Autobiography, fourth edition, Lawrence and Wishart, 1978, p.27.

68 Kirkwood, My Life of Revolt, p.97.

endanger national defence'.⁶⁹ At the 1916 BSP conference, with the pro-war elements routed, J. Fineberg, explained that 'it would certainly be a disaster for Europe if Germany were victorious in this war,' and H. Alexander called himself an internationalist 'but that did not prevent him from being a nationalist, prepared to defend his own country'.⁷⁰

This reinforces the argument that the anti-war left was defined by its opponents. And their opponents were certainly willing to define them as pro-Germans.⁷¹ G.H. Roberts MP pointed out the contradiction in the anti-war movement: 'Mr. MacDonald had said: Who of us want Germany to win? Mr. Wallhead [of the ILP] had said: We are opposed to the War. If they were opposed to the War they were not anxious that their country should win.'⁷² This was the starting point of those who attacked the anti-war left as anti-British. Hardie was one of the first to feel the wrath of pro-war feeling. He had organised a meeting in Aberdare on 6 August; the proposed chairman, C.B. Stanton, withdrew, explaining that 'although I am a Socialist, I am a Britisher'. The meeting was disrupted, and later as Hardie found refuge in the house of a sympathiser, a crowd outside shouted, 'Turn the German out!'⁷³ When anti-war pamphlets appeared, the pro-war left poured vitriol upon their authors. Robert Blatchford called Bernard Shaw's Common Sense About the War 'the meanest act of treachery ever perpetrated by an alien enemy residing in generous and long-suffering England'; he regarded the pamphlet as 'an outrage' that would be 'joyfully received and largely quoted in Germany'.⁷⁴ Pro-war socialists were quite prepared to make unfounded allegations about opponents of the war. Hyndman condemned the 'revolting lies' which filled 'pro-German pamphlets ... published ... at great expense' by the ILP, and explained that 'we are curious to know where it is getting money for all its publications in favour of the Germans against the Allies.'⁷⁵ When challenged by the BSP executive, Hyndman explained that he had meant the UDC, whom the Clarion called the 'Union of Fools and Traitors'.⁷⁶ Will Thorne in the House of Commons explained that 'Morel has for years been a

69 Justice, 28 Oct 1915, in Kendall, Revolutionary Movement in Britain, p.97.

70 BSP, Conference Report, 1916, pp.8, 10.

71 This section is confined to attacks by the pro-war left. For examples of attacks by those not of the left, see Marquand, Ramsay MacDonald, pp.186-190; Swartz, The UDC During the First World War, chapter 6. Michael Holroyd, Bernard Shaw Volume II 1898-1918 The Pursuit of Power, Chatto and Windus, 1989, pp.348, 354-358.

72 Labour Party, Conference Report, 1916, p.105.

73 Iain McLean, Keir Hardie, Allen Lane, 1975, pp.156-157. After Hardie's death, Stanton won the seat as a pro-war candidate against the official Labour candidate.

74 Holroyd, Bernard Shaw Volume II, p.354; Clarion, 20 Nov 1914.

75 Le Canard Enchaîné (Paris), 17 March 1915, Kendall, Revolutionary Movement in Britain, p.94.

76 Clarion, 24 Sept 1915.

paid agent of the German government.'⁷⁷ Aberdeen branch asked who was behind the anti-war group in the BSP which had enabled them to set up The Call. The editor ridiculed the questioners:

The Crown Prince is acting sub-editor, and Treitschke has returned from the grave to contribute, with von Bernhardt to our columns. Our financial resources are unimpeachable. We hold the Kaiser's draft on the Bank of England to cover all expenses.⁷⁸

But the hostility could have a more serious side, for H. Alexander believed that pro-war elements in the BSP actually gave information to the police about anti-war members. Certainly, Justice, on 23 December 1915, incited the arrest of a Russian member, asking, 'Who or what is Peter Petroff?' Shortly afterwards, Petroff was arrested. Pro-war socialists also had a less than liberal attitude to the freedom of the press. When the Labour Leader and ILP offices were raided by the police in August 1915, the New Statesmen said the ILP 'has issued pernicious literature', had a 'policy of anti-nationalism', and hence concluded that the raid was 'a little belated'.⁷⁹

A second line of attack on the anti-war groups was that they were unrepresentative of the Labour movement, and that they were not genuinely working class. A.M. Thompson wrote that the 'Britain-for-the-Prussian Party' was but a 'small gang of Labour misleaders'.⁸⁰ Will Crooks decided that these 'doctrinaire intellectuals' carried 'little weight' with their 'frankly pro-German propaganda'.⁸¹ At the 1916 Labour conference, G.J. Wardle MP, speaking for the executive, asked who spoke for Labour, 'the small coterie of the Independent Labour Party or the great Trade Unions of the country?'⁸²

Pro-war socialist groups used xenophobia and anti-semitism against Russian Jews and socialists who refused to fight alongside Tsarist Russia, the country that had forced them to flee religious or political persecution.⁸³ Since East London Jewish members played a major part in the anti-war section of the BSP, pro-war members used anti-semitism against them.⁸⁴ In October 1914, J.F. Green, who in 1905 had

77 Haste, Keep the Home Fires Burning, p.150.

78 The Call, 9 March 1916.

79 New Statesman, 21 Aug 1915. Most of the seized material was returned, and circulation of the Labour Leader was boosted, see Labour Leader, 2 Sept 1915.

80 Clarion, 2 April 1915.

81 The Truth About the War Makers, Introduction, pp.4-5.

82 Labour Party, Conference Report, 1916, p.103.

83 For official moves against Eastern European Jews in Britain, see Bush, Behind the Lines, chapter 6. A.M. Thompson suggested that it was Jewish capitalists who were the driving force behind German aggression, see 'Prussianism and Semitism,' Clarion, 5 Nov 1915.

84 Bush, Behind the Lines, p.177, points out that the majority of the anti-war group was not Jewish.

declared that 'for the international Social-Democrat there is no such word as "alien"', ventured 'to crave a little of your space in order to deplore the pro-German attitude of several Russo-Jewish refugees in this country'. 'It is hardly decent,' he complained, 'when we are fighting for our national existence, that men who are allowed to live here in a fuller enjoyment of liberty than in any other country should be denouncing the Government for going to war with Germany.'⁸⁵ When criticised in letter after letter, one of which asked mockingly whether Green's letter had been written by a socialist or a member of one of the Tsar's Black Hundreds, Green repented.⁸⁶ He was not anti-Jewish, he wrote, but Jews could not be 'real Russians' or 'real Englishmen'.⁸⁷ In mid-1915, Justice criticised East London Jews, who it felt were not contributing sufficiently to the war effort. Their hostility to Russia was misleading them about the nature of the war, 'with all the acuteness of their race'. Justice even regretted Marx's 'characteristic Hebrew detachment from national feeling'.⁸⁸ In April 1916, E.C. Fairchild, editor of The Call, condemned A.S. Headingley who had attacked 'anti-English cosmopolitan intriguers and Russian Jews of pro-German sympathies', who, Headingley said, had had an easy task in the BSP as the 'truly British element' were all at the front.⁸⁹ The Daily Herald condemned attacks on foreigners, appealing to their perception of people's Englishness.

It is unworthy of the dignity of the British people, who are supposed to be members of a powerful and civilised nation, to indulge in demonstrations against those who may be living in our midst, and who have been declared our enemies.... Shall we then in this hour of crisis disgrace the name of England by reducing ourselves to the level of untutored savages?⁹⁰

Anti-foreigner attacks by supporters of the war did not lead the anti-war left to reject patriotism. On the contrary, as during the Boer War, they claimed that their opposition was based on a true patriotism, unsullied by militarism or base materialism. Upon the outbreak of war, Clement J. Bundock, assistant editor of the Labour Leader wrote that

a patriot in truth is not he who will declare his country right when he knows it is wrong, but he who is jealous of his country's honour and dignity and will protest against the defamation of his country's name and bow his head in shame when he sees that name dishonoured. British patriots to-day are bowed in shame.⁹¹

85 Justice, 6 May 1905; Justice, 22 Oct 1914.

86 Justice, 5 Nov 1914.

87 Justice, 3 Dec 1914.

88 Justice, 3 and 10 June 1915, in Bush, Behind the Lines, p.177.

89 The Call, 20 April 1916.

90 Daily Herald, 7 Aug 1914.

91 Labour Leader, 13 Aug 1914.

George Lansbury, showing some hesitation about taking action to oppose the war, would have no questioning of the Daily Herald's patriotism:

If we regard our own country, its people and its valued institutions to be the test of real patriotism then we yield second place to none. But we are husbanding our resources, and waiting our opportunities to smash once and for all that spurious patriotism which has exploited the nation's energies and capacities, for reasons no higher than the impulse of the hog.⁹²

The fight for peace was a patriotic duty, the Herald claimed; 'Let No Man Who Loves His Country Cease Working for Peace,' a headline implored. The desire for peace, it claimed, was patriotic since 'love of country truly expressed would preserve the lives of men'.⁹³ Ramsay MacDonald claimed that diplomats had a narrow view of patriotism, whereas

The ordinary intelligent workman citizen has a conception of his country, her traditions, her honour, and the way to maintain them all, different from that of the average diplomatist; the view of the citizen is higher and embraces a wider field of thoughtfulness than that of the diplomatist; in the crowd of citizens there is always an able and influential section which stands for conciliation, and would successfully work for it if it knew in time that danger threatened.⁹⁴

Hence, were secret diplomacy to end, this conciliationist section of citizens would bring their wider patriotism to bear to preserve peace and solve diplomatic problems. It was clearly this section, around the ILP and UDC, that opposed the war. MacDonald explained to the Derbyshire ILP Federation that 'the patriot at home is he who tries to understand clearly what has happened and why, who fearlessly and closely observes what is happening now, and out of the knowledge thus gained prepares to face and overcome the problems that will arise after the war is over.'⁹⁵ There was a defensiveness over the question of patriotism. The anti-war left's response to accusations that they were unpatriotic was to argue that, on the contrary, they were true patriots. They would not accept a patriotism that accepted 'my country, right or wrong', for this was too narrow a definition. They argued from an oppositional stance that the government was not the nation, and misrepresented its true interests.

During the Boer War, anti-war groups had happily accepted the label 'pro-Boer', since they had seen in the government's enemies, who were, anyway, small agrarian societies facing an industrialised, imperial power, virtues admired by the left. In the

92 Daily Herald, 19 Aug 1914.

93 Daily Herald, 14, 26 Aug 1914.

94 MacDonald, War and the Workers, p.14.

95 Labour Leader, 2 Dec 1915.

First World War, largely accepting that Britain represented liberty against German despotism, the anti-war left refused to accept the 'pro-German' taunts thrown at them. From early in the war the left was forced to respond to this accusation. The Labour Leader tried to distinguish its position, 'We are not pro-German. We are not anti-British. We are pro-Peace. We are anti-War,' it explained.⁹⁶ In January 1915 it referred to 'the numerous occasions when we have stated in the most explicit language that we are not pro-German, that we hate German militarism, and we think Germany committed an inexcusable crime in invading Belgium. We are anti-war not anti-British.'⁹⁷ C.H. Norman explained his position as 'simply that I am on the side of the British people, *not* on the side of the British ruling classes ... I am not pro-German, pro-Russian, pro-French, pro-Belgian; but I am pro-English in the sense that *I know no reason why the British workers should be slaughtered in the interests of Russia and France.*'⁹⁸

The anti-war left supported its oppositional patriotic position in two main ways. First it condemned profiteering and high prices, pointing out that those responsible were claiming the mantle of patriotism. Second they condemned what they called 'British Prussianism', the suppression of individual liberties through the restriction of anti-war activities and even more so through the introduction of conscription. As well as the national defencist position of the majority of the anti-war left, these two areas of agitation helped to maintain the unity of the Labour movement despite differences of opinion on the war. The pro-war left, with few exceptions, still made radical social demands in wartime and opposed the introduction of conscription.

In the early part of the war, the anti-war left saw little point in anti-war agitation. Such agitation was met with much hostility. The BSP was in any case too divided to be very effective, and could not act officially as an anti-war party. The ILP believed anti-war activity was futile. The NAC instructed branches to continue 'educational Socialist propaganda, with its note of fraternity and internationalism [which], though not dealing specifically with the war, may help to prevent panics, wild jubulations, and excitements, and to repress outbursts of loud and boastful jingoism'. Willie Gallacher claimed that the Scottish District ILP instructed branches to avoid the controversial issues of the war.⁹⁹ This did not mean that the left dropped out of activity altogether. Rather than agitate against the war, it agitated around the social effects of the war. And in this, both pro-war and anti-war socialists and trade

96 Labour Leader, 29 Oct 1914.

97 Labour Leader, 7 Jan 1915.

98 C.H. Norman, British Militarism: A Reply to Robert Blatchford, City of London ILP/ National Labour Press, Manchester and London, 1915, p.4. Original emphases.

99 Labour Leader, 13 Aug 1914, in Haste, Keep the Home Fires Burning, p143. Gallacher, Revolt on the Clyde, p.24.

unionists could be involved. Upon the outbreak of war, most of the left became concerned about its effects on wages and particularly employment. On 4 August 1914, Arthur Henderson, secretary of the Labour Party, had called a meeting for the next day to form a national Peace Emergency Committee. Before it could meet, the Government's declaration of war and the Labour Party executive's approval of this, made such a peace committee redundant. The meeting went ahead with over one hundred delegates, and the War Emergency Workers' National Committee was formed to watch out for workers' social and economic interests in wartime. Both pro-war and anti-war socialists and trade unionists sat on the committee, from Hyndman to MacDonald.¹⁰⁰ Locally, pro- and anti-war socialists and trade unionists co-operated in relief committees.¹⁰¹ The needs of a modern war soon removed worries about mass unemployment as more and more people were drawn into the army or industry, and, to aid this, labour leaders were drawn into the organisation of the war effort. At a national level this resulted in the Treasury Agreement with the trade unions, the invitation to the Labour Party to join the government, which they accepted in May 1915, and a host of lesser appointments, for example H.M. Hyndman's appointment to the Consumer Council. This co-option of labour could extend to the personal interview of Kirkwood, deported Clyde shop steward, with Winston Churchill, Minister of Munitions. Kirkwood was seen as a leading anti-war figure; he was the hero of the January 1917 Labour conference for promising to return to Glasgow rather than go back to deportation. According to Kirkwood his interview with Churchill went as follows:

'How do you do, Mr Kirkwood? I have heard a good deal about you,' [Churchill] said.

'I dare say you have,' I replied.

'Yes, and I want you to know that, whatever happens, nothing is to be allowed to stand in the way of the production of the munitions of war.'

'Quite right,' I said.

Then he rang a bell, saying: 'Let's have a cup of tea and a bit of cake together.' What a difference so small a thing can make!

On the next page of his autobiography he boasts that production 'records were made only to be broken ... In six weeks we [the Mile-end shell factory] held the record for

100 Royden Harrison, 'The War Emergency Workers' National Committee, 1914-1920,' in Asa Briggs and John Saville (eds.), Essays in Labour History 1886-1923, Macmillan, 1971, pp.211-259. The ILP as a party joined in early 1915, though its members had already taken part in other capacities.

101 See Bush, Behind the Lines, chapter 2 for East London; Laybourn and Reynolds, Liberalism and the Rise of Labour, p.188 for Bradford Trades Council.

output in Great Britain.'¹⁰² Keith Middlemas has described this as 'patriotism blend[ing] nicely with self-interest,' and the term 'social-patriotism' could well be applied.¹⁰³ James Sexton of the Dock Labourers explained at the 1916 Labour conference how

when the boys came home again they would have the same old employer to fight as they had to fight before, but after what they had done in defence of the Country their claim would be so irresistible that no one could refuse their fair share in the products of the country.¹⁰⁴

W.N. Ewer mocked the subjects of this co-option of labour in 'A New National Anthem' in the Herald of 19 June 1915:

Long may our great King live,
Long may he reign to give
Garters and gauds.
Till Lib. and Lab. M.P.'s
Have all become K.G.'s
G.C. or K.C.B.'s
Possibly Lords.

Every wise democrat
Who has the sense to rat
Honoured shall be.
Knighted he's sure to get
Or made a baronet,
Shoved in the Cabinet
Or the P.C.

All title-hunting snobs,
All who are out for jobs,
Loudly should sing:
'To be a titled swell
Gladly my soul I'll sell;
Democracy to Hell!
God save the King!'

This did not mean that the pro-war left did not criticise employers and shareholders. Even the rabidly patriotic Clarion urged 'Hang the Exploiters ... *pour encourager les*

102 Kirkwood, My Life of Revolt, pp.165,166. Unfortunately an account by Churchill of this meeting does not seem to be extant. Most historians follow Martin Gilbert in using Kirkwood's autobiography as the authoritative account, Martin Gilbert, Winston S. Churchill Volume IV 1916-1922, Heinemann, 1975, pp.35-37. Churchill wrote a foreword for Kirkwood in which he praised his combination of 'sturdy independence', 'mood of political revolt' and 'his lively realization of all that British liberty means to the mass of our island folk', Kirkwood, My Life of Revolt, p.vi.

103 Politics in Industrial Society: The Experience of the British System since 1911, Andre Deutsch, 1979, p.73.

104 Labour Party, Conference Report, 1916, p.101.

autres.¹⁰⁵ But it fell more naturally to the anti-war left. Questioning the patriotism of the capitalist class was a major source of satisfaction; it was radical, but not necessarily anti-war. J.W. Kneeshaw shared a joke made by W.C. Anderson, an ILP MP. He referred to the familiar recruiting poster of a child asking its father the question, 'Father, what did you do during the great war?' 'When the shipowner's child asks him that question his reply will be simple and comprehensive, said Mr. Anderson. he will reply, "I did everybody." Such is his patriotism.'¹⁰⁶ The 'Conscription of Riches' campaign, which was led by the WEWNC, appealed to both pro- and anti-war groups, as Harrison has argued as a rallying point rather than as a coherent ideology, and was posed in terms of 'fair play' and 'equality of sacrifice'. Hence it did not directly challenge the war.¹⁰⁷

For all their criticism of the government and the profiteers, the co-option of their pro-war colleagues and even some of their anti-war colleagues, (Philip Snowden, a leading anti-war ILP MP, through his work on the all-party committee on liquor and the Central Control Board (Liquor Traffic), directly played a part in the war effort,) the anti-war left were forced to look to the state to ameliorate conditions for the working class. Since they rejected industrial action, MacDonald even declaring in the Commons in March 1916 that should his actions encourage industrial militancy, he would 'wish ... something to happen ... which would destroy every particle of influence that I ever had with the working men of this country', they had no choice but to work through government-sponsored committees.¹⁰⁸ There was also a widespread approval of the collectivism that the state was forced by circumstances to adopt. The pro-war Daily Citizen in October 1914 commented on the Sugar Commission:

Thus in the hour of its supreme need does the nation turn to the collectivist experiments urged for so many years by the Labour movement. And the experiments are not found wanting. They are abundantly and brilliantly vindicated.... Is it too much to hope that these experiments will be remembered when these dark, anxious days are at an end? If it be necessary for the State to guard the poor from exploitation now, will it not be sound policy to continue the experiment during what we hope will be the long years of unbroken peace?¹⁰⁹

105 Clarion, 15 Oct 1915, see also leader, 22 Jan 1915 entitled 'Hang the Traitors' about profiteering shipowners.

106 J.W. Kneeshaw, Profits and Patriotism, National Labour Press, Manchester, n.d., p.5. See also Robert Williams, 'Shipowners as Patriots,' and leader 'The Real Enemies of Britain,' Herald, 23 Jan 1915; George Lansbury, 'Patriots of the Purse,' Herald, 14 Aug 1915; W.C. Anderson, 'Patriotism of the Pocket,' Labour Leader, 11 Feb 1915; Hardie, 'Patriotism Measured in Millions,' Labour Leader, 25 March 1915.

107 Harrison, 'The War Emergency Workers' National Committee,' pp.247, 259, 255.

108 Austen Morgan, J. Ramsay MacDonald, Manchester UP, Manchester, 1987, p.68.

109 Marwick, The Deluge, pp.201-202.

And the labour leaders were drawn in to many of these experiments. As Ralph Miliband has noted, it was a 'dual role'. Not only were they representatives of the working class to the state, they were also representatives of the state in its relations with the working class. In this way, labour leaders began to take the step across the threshold between oppositional and state patriotism, for 'a host of Labour representatives became deeply involved in the business of the State and, with their service in the new bureaucracy that was born of the war, acquired a stake, if not in the country, at least in the country's official business.'¹¹⁰

'They Who Fight for Freedom, Must Themselves Be Free':¹¹¹ The Left and Individual Liberty

A second area where the left, pro-war and anti-war, was able to maintain its essential unity, was in opposition to infringements of individual liberty, particularly with regard to conscription. While the potential dangers of industrial conscription played a major role in the trade unions' opposition, it was mainly in terms of language about traditional English liberties that the opposition was framed. While the vast majority of the left accepted ideas of national defence, they also had radical ideas about the nation that was to be defended. As C.H. Norman explained, there were two aspects to patriotism: 'Patriotism is a passion impelling a person to serve his country (1) either in defending it from invasion; (2) or, in upholding the rights and liberties of the people, and maintaining the national laws and institutions against tyrannical infringements.' The governing classes, he argued, wanted to restrict patriotism to the former, while its true importance was in the latter.¹¹² MacDonald in a speech in Glasgow explained his philosophy of patriotism, and the need to defend his idea of the nation against domestic enemies:

When I like to think of my country at its best I think of it as the great liberal land where exiles came to dwell; the land where men and women thought honestly, spoke truly, none daring to make them afraid; the land which believed the best national service that could be rendered was the service of thinking men and thinking women, each contributing to the national intelligence his or her portion of that intelligence; the land where freedom of speech was a corner-stone and freedom of thought a keystone to the arch. (Applause.) That is the land I love and I like to think Great Britain was and still may be....

Our guests to-day are the guests of ideas, and the ideas come from the General Staff of the Prussian Army. (Hear, hear, and loud applause.) ... Great Britain under these circumstances is a land that we must fight for in order to make it free internally, as well as to defend it from external enemies....

The I.L.P. for the last two years and eight months has been standing by the soul

110 Miliband, Parliamentary Socialism, p.47.

111 J.W. Kneeshaw, How Conscription Works, National Labour Press, Manchester, n.d., p.11.

112 C.H. Norman, Nationality and Patriotism, National Labour Press, Manchester and London, 1915, p.6.

of Great Britain, whilst others have been deserting and selling it in every market place. (Loud applause.) Therefore, I say to you, we must fight for liberty; we must not allow Prussian militarism to come into this land under the pretence that it alone can defend the nation.¹¹³

Thus MacDonald counterpoised a version of a free Britain in peacetime with wartime Britain where alien ideas of the suppression of free speech and thought intruded. Before the war, any movement against political liberty was condemned as 'Russian methods'. Now, in wartime, with the propaganda effort of the government and its supporters portraying the war as one of British liberty against Prussian tyranny, with Russia as an ally of Britain, the left called any movement against political liberty 'Prussianism'.¹¹⁴ This could in fact only strengthen the desire for victory over Germany. The Defence of the Realm Act under which much of the suppression of anti-war opinion took place was therefore not seen as the expression of the vast majority of British MPs, but as a piece of interloping Prussianism.¹¹⁵ This language entered into all opposition to suppression of opponents of the war. When the offices of Labour Leader and the National Labour Press in Manchester and London were raided, Bingley ILP passed a resolution calling 'upon the Government to cease their attempts to Prussianise the country', and the General Executive of the Textiles Union condemned 'such German methods'.¹¹⁶ When much of the seized material was returned, the Labour Leader pointed out the 'futility of Prussianism' and declared that 'British Liberty Triumphs over British Prussianism'.¹¹⁷ After Lloyd George and Arthur Henderson were shouted down by the Clyde Workers' Committee on Christmas day, 1915, and this was reported in the Glasgow ILP paper, Forward, the paper was suppressed. The Herald called this 'still more Prussianism'.¹¹⁸ According to Kirkwood, after he was arrested he said to the Chief Constable and an army colonel, 'Why should you do this with me? I have never done anything. You talk about Germans. You are a Prussian yourself, to do this to

113 MacDonald, Patriots and Politics, National Labour Press, Manchester and London, n.d. 1917, pp.5-6.

114 Though the term had been in use since 1870, see Daniel Pick, War Machine: The Rationalisation of Slaughter in the Modern Age, Yale UP, New Haven and London, 1993, chapter 9.

115 The ILP conference of 1916 rejected a motion to repeal DORA under which many of its members were prosecuted, replacing it with an amendment to 'drastically amend' it. This is one strange outcome of the ILP's national defencism. They saw parts of DORA as necessary to the war effort, for example lighting regulations. ILP, Conference Report, 1916, pp.74-75.

116 Labour Leader, 26 Aug 1915.

117 Labour Leader, 2 Sept 1915.

118 Herald, 15 Jan 1916.

me without giving me a trial.... There's nothing foreign about me. I am in the land of my nativity. You are a Prussian, that's what you are.'¹¹⁹ The Call called the jailing of John Maclean and the deportations 'Prussianising Britain'.¹²⁰ The raids on Briton Ferry ILP and the homes of two ILPers in Altrincham, Cheshire, were described as 'Prussianism in Practice' by the Labour Leader.¹²¹ The 1917 Labour Party conference unanimously condemned the Clyde deportations as 'savour[ing] of that Prussianism we seek to destroy'.¹²²

In retrospect however some of the anti-war left were much more disposed to praise wartime British 'tolerance'. Kirkwood wrote in his autobiography:

What a country! Imagine such a series of incidents and such a scene in any other country! It is incredible. Had I been anywhere but in Britain, I should have been quietly dispatched as a nuisance or a traitor! Nuisance I may have been. Traitor I never was. Sometimes some of my colleagues wonder when I speak of this land in the way I do. I have most reason to know that it is in very truth the land of the brave and the free, for these soldiers were brave men, but they respected freedom.... But they never forgot that we were all British, they played the game in the British way and I hope they think the same of me.¹²³

Likewise, Snowden in his autobiography remarked on the subsequently perceived tolerance:

It will always be a matter for surprise and gratitude that we were permitted to carry on active propaganda for peace.... On the whole, the best traits in the British character were displayed. The love of freedom, the right to express opinions in the press and in public speeches which are opposed to the popular view are ingrained in our British people, and this, I think explains the general toleration which was shown to peace propaganda during the War.¹²⁴

During the war, with the threat of and subsequent introduction of conscription, the anti-war left did not praise British tolerance and liberty. The majority of the left, anti-war and pro-war, opposed the introduction of conscription. The super-patriots who called for conscription formed a minority, and thought in terms of a citizen

119 Kirkwood, My Life of Revolt, p.131. Upon his arrest he had likened it to what might happen in Russia under the Tsar, see p.129.

120 The Call, 20 April 1916.

121 Labour Leader, 15 June 1916.

122 Labour Party, Conference Report, 1917, p.111. When faced with the executions after the Easter Rising in Ireland, the British left did not use such language. The Herald used its pacifism to avoid comment; 'No lover of peace can do anything but deplore the outbreak in Dublin,' it declared. Labour's Memorandum on War Aims of December 1917 did not mention Ireland. Fifteen Labour MPs did vote for the Irish Nationalists' censure motion on martial law, but three voted against. James O'Grady spoke for Labour because he was Irish. See Geoffrey Bell, Troublesome Business: The Labour Party and the Irish Question, Pluto, 1982, pp.33-37.

123 Kirkwood, My Life of Revolt, pp.140-141.

124 Snowden, Autobiography Volume One, p.414.

army. Hence Blatchford could only bring himself to support 'conscription on "British lines"'.¹²⁵ Many on the left saw maintaining voluntary recruiting levels as a way of avoiding the need for compulsion in a war that used up millions of men. In August 1914, the Parliamentary Recruiting Committee had been established, enabling the political parties' organisations to be used for recruiting. Henderson was joint president with Asquith and Bonar Law. The TUC, General Federation of Trade Unions and the Labour Party set up the Labour Recruiting Committee in September 1915 in an effort to encourage voluntary recruiting to head off conscription.¹²⁶ It was perfectly compatible to support the war effort while opposing conscription. J.H. Thomas, Railwaymen's leader and Labour MP, opposing the second military service bill, which extended conscription to married men, emphasised that his 'protest against disuniting the people' did not weaken his determination to aid the war effort. He told the Commons that he

repudiate[d] that we are enemies of the country. I challenge any man to say that we could have done more than we have done, more than we shall continue to do, to obtain recruits, to maintain industrial peace, to do everything possible to win the war.¹²⁷

It was in the same sentiment that the Labour Party special delegate conference of 6 January 1916 rejected an amendment for compulsion by 2,121,000 to 541,000 votes. A joint NUR/ASE resolution re-affirmed the TUC's protest against compulsory military service, which would see 'the unity and solidarity of the nation ... gravely imperilled'. The resolution 'rejoice[d]' at the success of voluntarism. It was passed by 1,998,000 to 783,000 votes.¹²⁸ As 1915 had progressed, monthly recruiting figures had fallen. A national registration act had been passed to calculate the availability of potential recruits, and a last attempt at voluntarism was made through the Derby Scheme. In January 1916 the coalition government introduced a military service bill for single men. Throughout these months the left voiced its opposition to conscription. It did so mainly in language about ideas of British liberty and traditions of the freedom from compulsion, arguing that conscription was an adoption of the Prussianism with which Britain was supposed to be at war.

The Labour Leader argued that the imposition of conscription could be worse than defeat by Germany. 'The Government of this country,' it said,

125 Clarion, 22 Jan 1915.

126 See Roy Douglas, 'Voluntary Enlistment in the First World War and the Work of the Parliamentary Recruiting Committee,' Journal of Modern History, vol. 42, no. 4, 1970; Labour Party, Conference Report, 1916, pp.5-6.

127 Quoted in Blaxland, J.H. Thomas, pp.94-95.

128 Labour Party, Conference Report, 1917, p.7

has inflicted a greater defeat upon us than any German army has inflicted. An opposing army may crush materially: it can never crush our spirit. We alone can degrade the soul of our own nation. And if the decision of the Government be accepted by Parliament and people we shall have destroyed our soul.¹²⁹

Many on the left, therefore, saw compulsory military service as an attack on the very basis of Britain as a nation. Opposition to conscription voiced this concern. The ILP executive issued a model resolution to trades councils, trade unions, Labour and socialist organisations. 'It will be a strange recompense for all the sacrifice our country is making to crush Prussian military despotism in Germany,' it appealed, 'if advantage is taken of that sacrifice to thrust a system of Prussian militarism on the British nation.' It therefore urged these bodies to pass the following resolution:

That this meeting of declares its strongest opposition to compulsory military service, believing conscription in any form to be a violation of the principles of civic freedom hitherto prized as one of the chief heritages of British liberty, and that its adoption would constitute a grave menace to the progress of the nation ...¹³⁰

Within a few weeks, eighty-five ILP branches, eighteen trades councils, LRCs and Labour Parties and ten trade union branches had passed the ILP resolution.¹³¹ That the response was not better was largely because these bodies were passing their own resolutions, couched in the same terms. For example, Shoreditch Trades Council declared conscription to be 'contrary to the sentiments and principles of the British people, subversive of the free and democratic character of their institutions; and involves a serious menace to the liberty and freedom of the labour movement'. Bradford Trades Council opposed conscription 'in any form, military or industrial, and urged Parliament to offer their utmost opposition to any proposal to impose upon the British people a yoke which is one of the chief concerns of Prussian militarism'.¹³² The No-Conscription Fellowship, basing itself mainly on the belief that the state had no right to interfere in matters of conscience, in a manifesto called 'Shall Britons be Conscripts?' said, 'The time has come to appeal to all those who value our traditional British freedom ... THE RESPONSIBILITY IS YOURS TO MAINTAIN INTACT THE LIBERTIES OF THE BRITISH PEOPLE.'¹³³ The Labour Party conference in 1916 passed a resolution by 1,796,000 to 219,000 votes protesting 'emphatically against the adoption of Conscription in any form, as it is against the spirit of British democracy and full of danger to the liberties of the people'.¹³⁴

129 Labour Leader, 30 Dec 1915.

130 Labour Leader, 10 June 1915.

131 Labour Leader, 1 July 1915.

132 Herald, 19 June 1915; Laybourn and Reynolds, Liberalism and the Rise of Labour, p.189.

133 Herald, 8 Jan 1916.

134 Labour Party, Conference Report, 1916, pp.116-117.

It was J. Bruce Glasier for the ILP who expanded all this language into the fullest objection to conscription in two pamphlets in 1915.¹³⁵ In these he claimed that to see soldiers in uniform everywhere was 'as though some foreign rule had suddenly fallen on us - as though the nation were become continentalised, in fact,' and this meant that 'the birthrights of British citizenship embodied in the Magna Charta, Habeas Corpus and Bill of Rights are no longer inviolable.'¹³⁶ He went on that 'British Civicism' was 'the very secret of Britain's greatness,' and that it was not militarism but 'that boyish spirit of freedom and adventure which has spread the English race and speech across every sea'.¹³⁷ He argued that militarism was a result of British capitalists' fears of losing their foremost place in the world and their desire to regain control over the people who were beginning to learn how to use democracy.¹³⁸ Conscription was their latest attempt, done under the cover of wartime. He urged resistance to this attempt:

In the face of this affronting challenge to all that is consecrate in the life and freedom and hopes of the democracy does it not behove us to unfurl our banners and boldly defend our heritage? The peril of Junkerdom and military tyranny is not less if it comes from within instead of without our gates.¹³⁹

As in so much of the anti-war left's discourse on conscription, it was taken for granted that the war had to be fought, but that voluntary recruiting was superior to compulsion. 'That is the British principle: it applies all round. And it is the right principle. It is the voluntary principle. It is the true Socialist principle,' he wrote.¹⁴⁰

The outcome of all this was that a special conference of the Labour Party voted three to one against conscription. The Executive and Parliamentary Party then instructed Labour ministers to resign from the government. Henderson declared that he would vote for conscription whatever the Labour movement decided. Asquith, the prime minister, made minor assurances (some of which he subsequently broke), and the Labour ministers withdrew their resignations. The subsequent Labour conference, reaffirmed its opposition to the military service bill by 1,716,000 to 360,000 votes, but decided by 649,000 to 614,000 votes not to fight for its repeal should it become law. The government view of what was in the national interest therefore prevailed over the labour movement's view even within the movement

135 Glasier, Militarism, Labour and War pamphlet no. 2, National Labour Press, Manchester, 1915, and The Peril of Conscription, Labour and War pamphlet no. 3, ILP, 1915.

136 Militarism, pp.1, 2.

137 Militarism, p.4.

138 Militarism, p.14.

139 Peril of Conscription, p.8.

140 Peril of Conscription, p.21. See also George Lansbury, 'Labour Can Yet Kill Conscription,' Herald, 1 Jan 1916.

itself.¹⁴¹ However, a significant outcome was that in the campaign against conscription moderate pro-war and anti-war socialists and trade unionists had worked together.

In the last days of peace the British left, like most of the European left, were unprepared for war. As the realisation dawned on them that war was probable, they united in a desire to preserve peace. But once war broke out and the British government declared war on Germany the majority of the left supported the war effort out of simple patriotism. As J.R. Clynes later wrote, 'it seemed to me that we could no longer declare for peace when the country was at war.'¹⁴² Some on the left had no hesitation in supporting the war. J.H. Thomas, who arrived in New York on 4 August, rushed back to support 'his' country. Snowden, on the other hand, did not return from his world tour until February 1915. When he arrived he immediately declared his opposition to the war, but his decision to stay away for six months was likely to have been due to the 'intolerable conflicts' in his mind.¹⁴³ His opposition, like most of the anti-war left was ambivalent. As one historian has explained, 'the ILP opposed the War but at the same time was unwilling to build a mass movement in opposition. It opposed the War and yet wanted Britain to win it. It opposed the advocacy of military solutions and yet had nothing but praise for the men who volunteered to fight.'¹⁴⁴ Using Kirkwood's terms, it seems fair to say that the anti-war left were 'nuisances' rather than 'traitors'.¹⁴⁵ This conditional opposition was largely the result of the belief in the British nation as something real, defined by democracy and liberty, and that patriotism was a valid and real emotion. With the defence of the working class's social conditions and the fight against conscription, it was a reason for the maintenance of the unity of the British labour movement. The pro-war left found itself, to its pleasure, drawn into the running of the state, and this reinforced its belief in the possibilities of state-introduced socialism. And if the state was a progressive institution, then patriotism too could be seen as progressive.

141 Labour Party, Conference Report, 1916, p.7, 8, 117-124; Leventhal, Arthur Henderson, pp.58-59.

142 Clynes, Memoirs, p.173.

143 Blaxland, J.H. Thomas, pp.86-87; Cross, Snowden, p.133.

144 Jowitt, 'Snowden and the First World War,' p.40.

145 Kirkwood, My Life of Revolt, pp.140-141.

The Fight for British Socialism 1917-1921

Samuel Hynes has described a turning point in the psychological attitudes of the British towards the First World War after 1916: 'The war spirit was running down; only the momentum of the war itself continued undiminished.' He comments that this is not just a historical view, but was also a contemporary perception.¹ The anti-war left expected such a turning point, believing that reason would win through against what they saw as the hysteria of jingoism.² The left, therefore, repeatedly announced the arrival of turning points. These announcements continued to be made from 1916 to 1918. The ILP NAC told the 1916 conference that 'The war drags on but opinion in favour of securing peace by negotiation is slowly gaining ground.' Socialist Review, an ILP publication, declared in early 1917 that 'A notable sign of change has appeared on the war horizon.' The BSP executive in mid-1917 described how 'A new spirit is abroad among workers. The deadly apathy that has held them in its thrall is passing away, and the long-awaited reaction against capitalist jingoism is coming swiftly.' Labour Leader, in January 1918 announced, 'THE TURNING OF THE TIDE'.³ Despite this lack of certainty, the anti-war left felt that circumstances were beginning to favour their stance. Conscription, growing casualty lists, food shortages, higher prices and industrial unrest gave the anti-war left hope of a political reaction against the war. Yet it was an event outside Britain that had most impact upon the British left, whether pro- or anti-war. The repercussions of the Russian Revolution on the British left form the substance of the following chapters. This chapter deals largely with the impact within the left, while a later chapter deals with the left's relationships with outside political forces and the electorate.

- 1 Samuel Hynes, A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture, The Bodley Head, 1990, pp.101, 99.
- 2 Miles Taylor has argued that since the Boer War, most of the British left saw patriotism as 'the first instinct of a political deviant' stoked up by the press. But most of the left distinguished patriotism as something noble, from jingoism which was seen as a perversion, from which the masses would recover. Hedley V. Storey wrote 'Patriotism is not Imperialism and Jingoism is not Patriotism.' Miles Taylor, 'Patriotism, History and the Left in Twentieth Century Britain,' Historical Journal, vol. 33, no. 4, December 1990; Clarion, 16 June 1911.
- 3 ILP, Conference Report, 1916, p.7; Socialist Review, Jan-March 1917, p.1; The Call, 'A Call for Action,' 3 May 1917; Labour Leader, 3 Jan 1918.

The Turning of the Tide?

First reactions to the March revolution in Russia were determined by attitudes to the war. The pro-war left had been embarrassed by fighting a war for democracy in alliance with a despotic power they had consistently opposed before the war. The resolution passed by a united left in Trafalgar Square on 2 August 1914 had protested at 'any step being taken by the Government of this country to support Russia ... as being not only offensive to the political traditions of the country but disastrous to Europe'.⁴ When most of the left came to support the war, claiming it was being fought in defence of democracy, they largely ignored the contradiction of being allied to tsarist Russia. Blatchford had written that two powers were not guilty in the outbreak of war, Britain and France. 'And they were both democracies,' he claimed. He made no mention of Russia.⁵ Hyndman, who had a history of anti-Russianism going back to 1878, remained worried that 'the success of Russia' would be 'a misfortune to the civilised world'.⁶ However, by January 1915, he had put his name to a letter in Justice which absolved Russia of blame for the war, and declared that, since Germany's intention was to annex Belgium, crush France and cripple Russia, the war had to be won by the Allies.⁷ The pro-war left largely tried to ignore the alliance with Russia in wartime, though the New Statesman noted that, in the past, 'the sympathies of the ordinary Englishman, without distinction of party or class, have always been enlisted against the Russian government.' The situation had now changed, it said. After all, 'You cannot in common decency accept a man's help and abuse him at the same time.' To reinforce this, it asked, 'After all, might not even Russian tyranny be less black than it had been painted?'⁸

The news of an anti-tsarist revolution in Russia was greeted with relief by the pro-war left. It made their claim of a war between democracy and autocracy more solid, and it relieved fears about Russia's capacity for continuing the war. G.J. Wardle, a pro-war Labour MP, responding to Bonar Law's 'friendly greeting' from the 'Mother of Parliaments ... to the Parliament of an Allied country', declared that 'Two facts stand out with regard to this revolution - it is parliamentary and it is constitutional. It betokens no weakening of Russia's will in regard to the War.'⁹ The alliance was no longer contrary to British traditions, which largely meant parliamentarism and

4 Peter Stansky (ed.), The Left and War, Oxford UP, New York and London, 1969, p.84.

5 Clarion, 7 Aug 1914.

6 See Chushichi Tsuzuki, H.M. Hyndman and British Socialism, Oxford UP, 1961, pp.19, 21; Justice, 13 Aug 1914.

7 Justice, 28 Jan 1915. Among those signing the letter were Hyndman, Bax, Fisher, Lee, Thorne and Tillett.

8 'Our Alliance with Russia,' New Statesman, 9 Jan 1915.

9 House of Commons Parliamentary Debates, Fifth series, vol. 91, cols. 2085, 2090, 22 March 1917.

political liberty. The reaction of the pro-war left was less conditioned by internationalism than by the wartime alliance, and therefore their own patriotism. A telegram signed by twenty leading Labour and trade union figures headed by Henderson showed this:

Organised Labour in Great Britain is watching with deepest sympathy the efforts of the Russian people to deliver themselves from power of reactionary elements which are impeding their advances to victory. Labour in this country and France has long realised that despotism of Germany must be overthrown if the way is to be opened for free and peaceful development of European nations. This conviction has inspired them to make unprecedented efforts and sacrifices, and we confidently look forward to assistance of Russian Labour in achieving the object to which we have devoted ourselves. Earnestly trust you will impress on your followers that any remission of effort means disaster to comrades in trenches and to our common hopes of regeneration.¹⁰

The anti-war left, on the other hand, were confident that the revolution gave a tremendous boost to the peace movement internationally. As opponents of the war, they had maintained their unequivocal hostility to tsarism, which, in itself, had been a major reason for opposing the war, and celebrated its fall with enthusiasm. MacDonald at the Leeds Convention summed up these mixed motives:

It is fashionable in some quarters in this country to say 'We congratulate the Russians upon the revolution, but in some respects we regret it.' But today we congratulate the Russians on the Revolution without any reservations whatsoever. We do it not because the Revolution has happened, but because for years we wanted it to happen. We are glad not because we are compelled to be glad - but because it is in accordance with our democratic principles to be glad.... When this war broke out organised Labour in this country lost the initiative. It became a mere echo of the old governing classes' opinions. Now the Russian Revolution has given you the chance to take the initiative yourselves.¹¹

The Leeds Convention, held on 3 June 1917, was organised to welcome the revolution, and it represented the medley of reasons for such greetings. Delegates had mixed feelings and motives, but there was enough unity for the resolutions to be passed virtually unanimously. Only the presence of the super-patriot seamen's leader, Captain Tupper, ensured some dissent. The 1,200 delegates passed resolutions welcoming the revolution, urging the British government to restore civil liberties, and, remarkably, calling for the formation of workers' and soldiers' councils.¹² This latter resolution, moved by W.C. Anderson of the ILP, suggested

10 R. Page Arnot, The Impact of the Russian Revolution in Britain, Lawrence and Wishart, 1967, p.21.

11 Stephen Richards Graubard, British Labour and the Russian Revolution 1917-1924, Harvard UP and Oxford UP, Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1956, pp.36-37.

12 Herald, 9 June 1917.

that the convention aimed to carry into effect the popular slogan 'Follow Russia!','¹³ though the resolution was given an English and Fabian ring to it, by urging the formation of such councils 'in every town, urban and rural district'.¹⁴ Gallacher conveys a more accurate impression of the convention, if one takes account of the general anti-tsarism, and allows for some factual errors and Gallacher's belief that great opportunities had been missed in the years between 1917 and 1919:

About two thousand delegates packed the hall and were treated to a regular orgy of generalities on the beauty and holiness of bourgeois democracy. MacDonald, Snowden, Lansbury, and others went all out to sing the praises of parliamentary democracy. Russia had got her freedom at last; what they had all worked and prayed for. Soon Russia would have a 'free parliament just like us'.¹⁵

Leeds was not intended by the majority of delegates as the first step in 'following Russia' but as a celebration of the Russian people's taking of the British left's advice, 'follow Britain.'

But the Russian Revolution did strike a blow at ideas of British liberty and democracy. The war had seen infringements of civil liberties that the left had said would destroy any notion of traditional liberties. After the Russian Revolution it could no longer be claimed that Britain was the freest country in the world. Lansbury wrote of the Russian revolutionary programme:

We boast of British freedom and boast of the liberty which we enjoy, but should the new Russian Government carry out the programme ... the political condition of affairs in Russia will be very much more liberal and progressive than in any other belligerent country and most certainly in advance of the conditions prevailing in this country, which was formerly known as the home of civil and religious freedom.¹⁶

At Leeds, a resolution on civil liberties was passed:

This Conference calls upon the Government of Great Britain to place itself in accord with the democracy of Russia by proclaiming its adherence to and determination to carry into immediate effect a charter of liberties establishing complete political rights for all men and women, unrestricted freedom of the Press, freedom of speech, a general amnesty for all political and religious prisoners, full rights of industrial and political association, and the release of labour from all forms of compulsion and restraint.¹⁷

Racial ideas claiming an innate democratic spirit for Anglo-Saxon peoples and an

13 See for example, Labour Leader, 17 May 1917.

14 Labour Leader, 7 June 1917.

15 William Gallacher, Revolt on the Clyde, fourth edition, Lawrence and Wishart, 1978, first published 1936, pp.149-150. Lansbury was not a delegate, he was absent due to illness.

16 Herald, 24 March 1917.

17 Herald, 9 June 1917.

innate political backwardness for Slavs lost credibility in 1917, even if they were later to return. In June 1917 the anti-war left appealed for civil liberties not by referring to ideas of traditional British liberty but by reference to another country.¹⁸

The Russian Revolution also pushed the pro-war left towards a formulation of war aims, and this in itself brought them closer to the anti-war left, which had been campaigning for such a step since early in the war.¹⁹ Thus, in December 1917, a joint Labour Party/TUC conference accepted a memorandum on war aims drawn up by Sidney Webb, and in February 1918 this was used as a basis for discussion at an inter-Allied labour and socialist conference in London.²⁰ These war aims included making the world safe for democracy, an end to secret diplomacy, international arbitration through a league of nations, and the restoration of Belgian independence. While they depended on the defeat of Germany, they also coincided with the anti-war left's aims. Hence the latter came to see Labour's war aims as marking a turning point in the war. It is, however, important to recognise the limits of Labour's change of heart.

Henderson's conversion to attendance at the Stockholm conference was not a movement into the anti-war camp. He explained to both the House of Commons on 1 August and the Labour Party conference on 10 August that attendance would be better for the Allies than non-attendance, when less moderate forces could predominate.²¹ During the German spring offensive of 1918, Henderson declared that 'the latest act of military aggression on the part of the German government placed under temporary suspension the moral, political and diplomatic effort.'²² His wish for a democratic peace was conditional on Germany's defeat. The Labour Party executive also reaffirmed its commitment to the war effort during April 1918. It passed a resolution declaring that:

The Labour Party places on record its deep sense of gratitude for, and admiration of, the heroic resistance offered by our Armies in the field to the terrible onslaughts of the enemy during the recent offensive. Such magnificent courage and resolution - so consistent with the best British traditions - imposes an imperative obligation upon all sections of the country to assist by their skill, energy or substance, to carry on the great work of liberation in which our armies are engaged in order that our joint efforts may eventually result in the final overthrow of militarism and secure for the world a lasting and democratic peace.²³

18 See Daniel Pick, War Machine: The Rationalisation of Slaughter in the Modern Age, Yale UP, New Haven and London, 1993, chapter 11 for views on the relationship between Slavs, Teutons and civilisation in 1914.

19 For example, Herald, 8 May 1915.

20 See Paul U. Kellog and Arthur Gleason, British Labor and the War, Boni and Liveright, New York, 1919, pp.29-32, 61-73, 343-351, 352-366.

21 F.M. Leventhal, Arthur Henderson, Manchester UP, Manchester and New York, 1989, pp.67, 68.

22 Chris Wrigley, Arthur Henderson, GPC Books, Cardiff, 1990, p.125.

23 Labour Party, Conference Report, June 1918, p.18.

Even Snowden, addressing the April 1918 conference of the ILP as chairman, decided that, 'The military situation on the Western front has, for the time being, made one indisposed to adopt the critical attitude'.²⁴ Likewise the Herald, before the offensive had started, reasserted that, 'We have never advocated, and shall never advocate, a "German peace", the betrayal of Belgium, or the letting down of our brothers at the front.'²⁵ The labour movement after 1917 did become more united, but it was a unity made possible by the patriotic minimum of an Allied victory. What had changed was that discussion of the terms upon which peace could be achieved was becoming widespread. Lord Lansdowne's peace letter was printed in the Daily Telegraph at the end of November 1917; before the end of the year, the War Cabinet decided it must make a statement on war aims.²⁶ In this context, even the pro-war left became more willing to discuss peace terms.

A split in the labour movement did occur, however, and it was directly related to patriotism. The super-patriotic left was made up of a variety of groups. The Socialist National Defence Committee moved through various names to become the National Democratic Party, but its moving force remained Victor Fisher. Another group consisted of trade unionists who wished to form a trade union party excluding 'the professed friends of Germany' in the ILP.²⁷ Closely connected to this group was Havelock Wilson, who formed the Merchant Seamen's League. Finally, there were those, such as George Barnes, who refused to leave the Coalition government when the Labour conference in November 1918 decided the party would do so. These groups were united in putting their ideas of patriotism before party, a justification used before the war by some Labour MPs to vote against the party on armaments votes. G.H. Roberts, who as Labour chief whip, had voted against a reduction in the navy estimates in 1912, explained in 1918 that

he knew that what he was saying might involve him in a parting of the ways [with Labour], but he was a British citizen before he was a politician, and if and when he was compelled to choose between his conception of British citizenship and his association with any political party he would say to the party - 'Go hang! I am proud to be a British citizen.' ... His view was 'My own country first, and the British Empire in association therewith; the Allies next'.²⁸

Their patriotism usually involved a virulent anti-Germanism. Fisher and Ben Tillett used the slogan 'Bomb the Boches!' to attract support, and it was Barnes who

24 ILP, Conference Report, 1918, p.42.

25 Herald, 9 Feb 1918.

26 See John Turner, British Politics and the Great War: Coalition and Conflict 1915-1918, Yale UP, New Haven and London, 1992, pp.248-249, 265-269.

27 John Hodge quoted in Kellog and Gleason, British Labor and the War, p.225.

28 Kellog and Gleason, British Labor and the War, p.226.

who initiated the slogan 'Hang the Kaiser!' in the 1918 general election campaign.²⁹ This was linked with the demand for a boycott of Germany after the war. The Merchant Seamen's League commissioned A.P. Herbert to write 'The Seamen's Boycott Song', one verse of which went:

O never a Fritz shall sail
In a ship that sails with me,
Never a box or bale
That smells of Germany.
Never the likes of they
Shall soil the English shore
Till the seamen of England say,
'You've settled the seamen's score.'³⁰

They were resolutely hostile towards the ILP and other anti-war groups. Supporters of the Merchant Seamen's League were required to 'pledge ... to do my best to help Patriotic Labour to fight against the Bolshie Labour Bosses of the I.L.P. and all their mischievous and un-English Activities; and to oppose any Defeatist or Pacifist Candidate for Parliament or other Public Body.'³¹ It was this latter position that brought the super-patriots into conflict with the Labour Party. As long as they were prepared to support Labour candidates in elections, membership of the Labour Party was compatible with membership of a super-patriotic organisation. The National Socialist Party, which held views similar to other super-patriots, remained affiliated to the Labour Party, because it only ran candidates under Labour auspices. Hyndman, aged seventy-five in 1917, volunteered to investigate 'German spy waiters' but the police declined his offer to dine out for the war effort.³² In January 1918, Fisher had announced that the BWL policy was 'to challenge the re-election of the Pacifist members of the Labour party, notably Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, Mr Philip Snowden, Mr Jowett and others'.³³ This brought the BWL into conflict with the Labour Party and membership of the two bodies became incompatible. Some Labour MPs left the BWL.³⁴ Fisher had been in contact with Lord Milner since 1915, and through him had come to an agreement with the Conservative Party to allow patriotic labour candidates a free run in a number of seats in the general election.³⁵

29 Roy Douglas, 'The National Democratic Party and the British Workers' League,' Historical Journal, vol. XV, no.3, 1972, p.537; C.L. Mowat, Britain Between the Wars 1918-1940, Methuen, 1956, p.4.

30 The Seamen's Boycott Song, McCorquodale, 1918.

31 The Seamen's Crusade, Merchant Seamen's League, n.d. 1918.

32 Tsuzuki, Hyndman and British Socialism, p.243.

33 The Times, 26 Jan 1918, in Douglas, 'The National Democratic Party,' p.539.

34 See also Labour Party, Conference Report, Jan 1918, p.35.

35 See J.O. Stubbs, 'Lord Milner and Patriotic Labour, 1914-1918,' English Historical Review, vol. 87, 1972, p.752.

The rejection by the TUC conference in September 1918, by 3.8 million to 567,000 votes, of the formation of a Trade Union Party consigned those around Havelock Wilson to the political margins.³⁶ Despite the election of nine or ten patriotic labour MPs in December 1918, the end of the war saw the end of any need for super-patriotism, and none of the MPs survived the 1922 election under a patriotic labour banner.³⁷ But patriotic labour was not simply a wartime phenomenon, for it had its roots in Edwardian Britain, among those Labour MPs who rebelled against the party on armaments, and those like Blatchford and Fisher who put patriotism at the forefront of their socialism. It was Blatchford's slogan, 'Britain for the British', which patriotic labour rallied around, but its message was now aimed against Germany rather than against the British propertied classes. Fisher said that this slogan contained the National Democratic and Labour Party's spirit.³⁸

'Now for the Enemy at Home'³⁹

The end of the war in November 1918 did not end the peril to the nation. The threat now came from within. Its base was the growth of class consciousness as shown in the growth in membership of trade unions from 4.1 million in 1914 and 6.5 million in 1918, to 8.3 million in 1920. Working days lost to strikes rose from 9.9 million in 1914, 2.9 million in 1915, 5.9 million in 1918, 35 million in 1919, 26.6 million in 1920, to 85.5 million in 1921.⁴⁰ At the same time, soldiers rioted and demonstrated to speed up de-mobilisation.⁴¹ In this situation, the language of class swept the language of radical patriotism aside. Socialists and labour activists had always used both vocabularies in unison. For all their denials of class as the motive force in social transformation, it had been recognised that the labour movement's aim was the material advance of the poorest sections of society at the expense of the richest sections. In the years immediately after the First World War, the language of class predominated. A Ministry of Labour official noted in February 1920 'an increasing tendency for the trade unionists of one shop works or small districts to act together, irrespective of their divisions into crafts or occupations. What is called "class consciousness" is obliterating the distinction between those who follow different occupations in the same works.'⁴² Basil Thomson, Director of Intelligence between

36 See Kellog and Gleason, British Labor and the War, chapter 21.

37 Douglas, 'The National Democratic Party,' pp.551-552.

38 The Times, 1 June 1918, in Stubbs, 'Lord Milner and Patriotic Labour,' p.747.

39 The Call, 21 Nov 1918.

40 Henry Pelling, A History of British Trade Unionism, fourth edition, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1987, p.298.

41 See Andrew Rothstein, The Soldiers' Strikes of 1919, Macmillan, 1980.

42 James E. Cronin, Labour and Society in Britain 1918-1979, Batsford, 1984, p.22.

1919 and 1921, warned of 'class hatred aggravated by foolish and dangerous ostentation of the rich, the publication of large dividends, and distrust of a "Government of profiteers"'.⁴³

The use of the language of patriotism by the left was further damaged since such language had been devalued by its use in wartime by employers, politicians and trade union leaders to discourage industrial action. Social patriotism had been used, and was found wanting when Lloyd George failed 'to make Britain a fit country for heroes to live in'.

Another major blow was struck against notions of Englishness by the perception that Britain was close to revolution in the immediate post-war years. Henderson, in The Aims of Labour, claimed that 'barricades and blood' revolution was 'alien to the British character', but he had clearly not even convinced himself, for on the very next page he warned violence 'will rule the thoughts of the masses of the people,' and 'vast numbers of the population [were] skilled in the use of arms, disciplined, [and] inured to danger.'⁴⁴ Most historians consider that a revolutionary situation did not exist in 1919; Ralph Miliband, for example, has declared that 'The issue ... was not revolution and socialism, but direct action for specific and limited purpose.' Chris Wrigley writing in 1979 decided that 'Whether there was revolutionary potential in the social tension in 1919 is hard to say,' but in 1993 was more confident that no potentially revolutionary situation existed. The Trotskyist Chanie Rosenberg, however, using Lenin's criteria for revolution, argues that the industrial unrest, which went beyond economic demands, showed that the working class did not want to live in the old way any longer, and that the unreliability of both army and police meant that the ruling class could no longer rule in the old way.⁴⁵ It would appear that Wrigley's 1979 position is most tenable, for there are too many variables which cannot be examined with accuracy. Probably of key significance was the lack of leadership or co-ordination of the social unrest.⁴⁶ And it was this that proved

43 Cronin, Labour and Society, p.21. See Keith Jefferey and Peter Hennessy, States of Emergency, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983, for government intelligence in the face of industrial unrest. For changes in the language of class, see Bernard Waites, A Class Society at War: England 1914-1918, Berg, Leamington Spa, 1987, chapters 1 and 2.

44 Arthur Henderson, The Aims of Labour, Headley Bros., 1918, pp.57, 58.

45 Ralph Miliband, Parliamentary Socialism, second edition, Merlin, 1972, p.66; Chris Wrigley, '1919: The Critical Year,' in Chris Wrigley (ed.), The British Labour Movement in the Decade after the First World War, University of Loughborough Department of Economics, Loughborough, 1979, p.15; Wrigley, 'The State and the Challenge of Labour in Britain 1917-20,' in Chris Wrigley (ed.), Challenges of Labour: Central and Western Europe 1917-1920, Routledge, and New York, 1993, p.262; Chanie Rosenberg, 1919: Britain on the Brink of Revolution, Bookmarks, 1987.

46 Miliband, Parliamentary Socialism, p.65; Wrigley, '1919: The Critical Year,' p.5; Wrigley, 'The Challenge of Labour in Britain,' p.263; Rosenberg, 1919: Britain on the Brink, p.85.

decisive in March 1919. The acceptance by the miners of a Royal Commission removed the most serious threat to the government. Frank Hodges recalled how he and Robert Smillie, a left wing union official, 'threw in the whole weight of our argument and our influence to get the men and the delegates to accept the Royal Commission. Hours, days, were spent in the tussle, and in the end we won.'⁴⁷ It is probable that, had there been an organised body arguing against the acceptance of the Commission, the miners would have broken with their leadership, struck, and defeated the government and coalowners. It is probable then that direct action for political ends would have presented the old order with demands that it could not allow, but it would not have been able to rely on the armed forces to prevent them.

Whatever the actual chances of a British revolution, the contemporary perception from all points of the political spectrum was that not only was it possible, but likely. Gallacher and Harry Pollitt, founders of the Communist Party, were sure an opportunity had been missed. Gallacher later wrote with regret that

Revolt was seething everywhere, especially in the army. We had within our hands the possibility of giving actual expression and leadership to it, but it never entered our heads to do so. We were carrying on a strike when we ought to have been making a revolution.⁴⁸

Pollitt, in the same mood, wrote, 'I look upon this period of golden opportunities, when we failed to provide the workers with real leadership, as one of the blackest and most tragic in the whole of my experience.'⁴⁹ Beatrice Webb, in her diaries, recorded the growing fear of revolution. 'The Bolsheviks grin at us from a ruined Russia and their creed, like the plague of influenza, seems to be spreading westwards from one country to another,' she wrote in November 1918.⁵⁰ Figures outside the labour movement shared Webb's anxiety rather than Pollitt's regret. Walter Long sent alarmist memoranda to Lloyd George urging firm steps, otherwise 'there will be some sort of a revolution in this country ... before twelve months are past.'⁵¹ Home Office agents sent in worrying reports. One such, from an agent working inside Glasgow BSP, illustrates the varied strands that combined to heighten fears:

The ultimate end of this manoeuvre [a general strike] would be Revolution and a Soviet form of Government. The dangers consequent upon even the slightest

47 Miliband, Parliamentary Socialism, p.66n.

48 Gallacher, Revolt on the Clyde, p.221.

49 David Mitchell, 'Ghost of a Chance: British Revolutionaries in 1919,' History Today, November 1970, p.761.

50 Norman and Jeanne MacKenzie (eds.), The Diary of Beatrice Webb Volume Three 1905-1924 'The Power to Alter Things, Virago/London School of Economics and Political Science, 1984, p.316, 4 Nov 1918.

51 Wrigley, '1919: The Critical Year,' p.1.

success of such a scheme must be patent to anyone who has studied the course of events in Russia. The spread of this spirit is alarming, and evidence can be obtained of a determined effort to emulate the Russian Bolshevik movement in this country. It is also highly significant that while the soldiers are openly declaring their objection to being sent to Russia to fight the Bolsheviks, this very gang of agitators are publishing broadcast a pamphlet Hands off Russia, while their press is divided between panegyrics of praise of the Bolshevik form of Government and frenzied abuse of a Government which sends an Army to fight the 'first Socialist Republic'.⁵²

The Cabinet continued to discuss potential revolution into 1920, holding a conference on industrial disturbances in February 1920. Thomas Jones of the Cabinet secretariat recorded in his diary the humour of these discussions, noting that 'during the discussion Bonar Law so often referred to the stockbrokers as a loyal and fighting class until one felt that potential battalions of stockbrokers were to be found in every town.'⁵³

There have been two aims behind this discussion of contemporary perceptions of the likelihood of revolution in the post-war years. First, to show that for a number of years the English national character was not seen as an insuperable obstacle to revolution. Thus, in the mid-twenties, when both Labour and Conservative figures re-built ideas of English moderation they had to ignore the recent past. Second, this discussion has been to lay a base upon which to consider subsequent debates inside the left. It has also shown the interconnections between industrial unrest, direct action, Bolshevism and opposition to intervention in Russia, and their relationship to the British left. These relations will be discussed individually in order to draw out their main features, though in practice the overlapping of these debates was considerable.

Industrial Unrest and Direct Action

Probably the most immediately threatening force against parliamentary socialism was the argument for direct action, stemming as it did from the massive wave of industrial unrest unleashed by the end of the war. It was almost impossible to argue that strikes were un-British, since they were occurring on such a scale, and nor was there was any pre-war golden age to look back to; the years 1910 to 1914 had also seen a very high incidence of strikes. In the middle of such a wave of strikes, there were 1,607 separate disputes in 1920, for example, the claim that strikes were not British would alienate large sections of the working class. For Labour and trade union leaders the difficulty was great, for in the last resort they had to support

52 R.K. Middlemas, The Clydesiders, Hutchinson, 1965, p.89.

53 Thomas Jones, Whitehall Diary Volume I 1916-1925, edited by Keith Middlemas, Oxford UP, 1969, p.101.

strikes by their supporters and members, however distasteful they found them.

Labour movement leaders had believed that after the war strikes would prove less necessary. They believed their patriotism would be rewarded, and that wartime state control would be a permanent feature in which they would continue to have a role. The co-option of labour leaders during the war only reinforced pre-war thinking on the state. Henderson explained that the effect of the war had been that

Methods of State control which would once have been regarded as intolerable infringements of the rights and liberties both of employers and workmen have been accepted without effective protest even from those bred in the individualist tradition of the last century.⁵⁴

Labour accepted this, since they felt themselves to be involved. Beatrice Webb described 'a steady drift towards Government control and responsibility', and with this went 'the full recognition of the producers' organisations as junior partners in this control'.⁵⁵ As trade union leaders were drawn into the state's business so they were drawn towards a form of state socialism, expressed by Sidney Webb in Labour and the New Social Order.⁵⁶ The war did not lead to a victory of Fabianism over the trade unionists, since Fabianism itself had changed since 1912 as the Society sought a role inside the Labour Party. And Labour had, anyway, favoured state action before Sidney Webb's election to the party executive. MacDonald was the key figure in formulating Labour's attitude to the role of the state, and despite his opposition to the war, and hence his exclusion from the machinery of the state, he too believed that due to the war 'Labour has had to be made a national co-partner'.⁵⁷ Whereas Webb and Henderson favoured the functional participation of labour in the state, MacDonald preferred to argue for civic participation. He explained that

The Independent Labour Party begins by taking the great unities of community, nation, and State for granted. It studies functions and functional organisations, but it cannot understand them, and they cannot understand themselves, except in their relation to the whole life of the community which they serve. Thus it cannot hesitate in deciding in favour of a State sovereignty, or in coming to the conclusion that the personality which operates in the community is the citizen, not the industrial personality.⁵⁸

54 Henderson, Aims of Labour, p.9.

55 Margaret I. Cole (ed.), Beatrice Webb's Diaries 1912-1924, Longmans Green, 1952, p.69, 27 July 1916.

56 For the trade unions and the new programme see Ross McKibbin, The Evolution of the Labour Party 1910-1924, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1974, chapter 5; for Webb, Henderson and MacDonald and the new programme see J.M. Winter, Socialism and the Challenge of War, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London and Boston, 1974 .

57 J. Ramsay MacDonald, Parliament and Revolution, The Socialist Library vol. XII, National Labour Press, Manchester, 1919, p.12.

58 J. Ramsay MacDonald, Parliament and Democracy, 1920, in Frank Bealey (ed.), The Social and Political Thought of the British Labour Party, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1970, p.103.

Those favouring functional participation believed they had proved their worth in wartime, and believed that through such bodies as the National Industrial Conference and Whitley Councils the labour/state partnership would continue. Trade union leaders also welcomed continued co-operation with business leaders through the National Alliance of Employers and Employed.⁵⁹ The Sankey Commission to investigate nationalisation of the mines was seen as the climax to this partnership; Beatrice Webb wrote that Sidney 'believes that the Coal Commission will be the beginning of a landslide into the communal control of industries and services', and had high hopes herself for the Industrial Conference, which she called 'Soviet Government peacefully incorporated in the British Constitution; a revolution in a fit of absentmindedness, without machine guns or barricades - without even waving the red flag'.⁶⁰ In practice there was no contradiction between the MacDonald and Webb views, for the latter view also accepted state sovereignty over other interests. This was explained by J.H. Thomas, leader of the National Union of Railwaymen, to striking tube workers in February 1919:

Our union is the strongest in the country. We can demand that unless such a thing is done, we can paralyse the community. That is our power. I want to examine what is our duty in relation to that power. However strong and powerful we may be, the State is more powerful and more important. Citizenship has a stronger claim than any sectional interest. We as trade unionists have got to keep clearly in mind that we have to make our sectional claims consistent with and part of our duty as citizens of the State.⁶¹

It was this belief that Lloyd George played on when meeting leaders of the Triple Alliance in 1919. He is reputed to have told Robert Smillie for the miners, Robert Williams for the transport workers and Thomas for the NUR that 'If a force arises in the State which is stronger than the State itself, then it must be ready to take on the functions of the State, or withdraw and accept the authority of the State.' 'From that moment on,' said Smillie, 'we were beaten and we knew we were.'⁶² This admission is more significant because Smillie and Williams were left-wingers. They had been vociferous proponents of direct action at the 1919 Labour conference. Indeed, Williams was a founding member of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB).⁶³

59 See Wrigley, 'The State and the Challenge of Labour in Britain,' pp.275, 282.

60 Cole (ed.), *Beatrice Webb's Diaries*, pp.162, 157, 23 June 1919, 27 March 1919.

61 Gregory Blaxland, *J.H. Thomas: A Life for Unity*, Frederick Muller, 1964, p.121. Thomas explained the same point to the House of Commons, *HC Debates* 5:112, 339, 13 Feb 1919.

62 Aneurin Bevan, *In Place of Fear*, William Heinemann, 1952, pp.20-21.

63 The Communist Party expelled Williams in 1921 after 'Black Friday' when it was decided that all trade union officials were equally responsible for the debacle, Miliband, *Parliamentary Socialism*, p.89n.

The state control of industry in wartime reinforced the belief in the state's supremacy over sectional interests. E.H. Carr commented after the Second World War that 'the socialisation of the nation has its natural corollary the nationalisation of socialism.'⁶⁴ Trade union leaders in the wake of the First World War appealed to the patriotism of the government and urged them to make an appeal to the patriotism of workers in their claims for permanent state control. Thomas, at the 1917 Labour conference, argued that

When the War broke out the Government at once decided to take charge of the railways, thus admitting that in their judgement it was dangerous to have private ownership of the railways during time of war.... What the Government found to be in the national interest today would be in the national interest when peace was restored.⁶⁵

In the Commons, William Brace pointed out the benefits of nationalisation:

To appeal to workmen in the name of the State is to touch them in their most vital spot, their native patriotism. If you would allow us to appeal to the workmen to withhold doing anything in the form of the industrial action policy because it was the property of the State and on behalf of the State, we should be infinitely more effective than any appeal that can be made to them if the concerns are to be allowed to continue in the hands of and under the control of private individuals.⁶⁶

Direct action posed a threat to the authority of the state. Labour leaders not only accepted that authority, but believed they now had a role in the state, hence they opposed direct action. Indeed, it was argued that the use of direct action by Labour would only encourage its opponents to do the same when, in the not too distant future, Labour formed a government.⁶⁷ But they were in a position of weakness in relation to arguments for direct action. First, the result of the 1918 general election was seen widely on the left as fraudulent. Two out of every five of the electorate had not voted, and the Herald talked of the 'virtual disfranchisement of the army'.⁶⁸ Those on the left were particularly appalled by the baseness of the campaign. Snowden said of Lloyd George that 'never before in the history of this country did a politician sink to such depths of infamy to keep in office,' and MacDonald condemned the 'exploitation by political leaders moved by unusually low standards of honour'.⁶⁹ Labour also saw the 1918 intake of MPs as 'the profiteers'

64 E.H. Carr, Nationalism and After, Macmillan, 1945, p.19.

65 Bealey (ed.), Social and Political Thought of the Labour Party, pp.82-83.

66 HC Debates, 5:112, 333-334, 13 Feb 1919.

67 See for example, Clynes in The Times, 13 Sept 1919.

68 Labour Party, Conference Report, 1919, p.28; Herald, 21 Dec 1918.

69 ILP, Conference Report, 1919, p.34; MacDonald, Parliament and Revolution, p.2.

Parliament'.⁷⁰ Second, the Parliamentary Labour Party between 1918 and 1922 was largely ineffective. While Labour polled just under a quarter of votes cast in 1918, only 59 Labour MPs were elected. The House was dominated overwhelmingly by the Coalition. Since those associated with an anti-war stance were defeated, the PLP was manned by trade union MPs, and proved 'a very tame lion ... led by the respectable but dull-witted Adamson'.⁷¹ That the The Call condemned the PLP's 'scandalous inactivity' was to be expected, but the Labour conference was also critical, and the ILP NAC formally complained of the PLP's apathy on foreign affairs.⁷²

The strength of the direct action impulse in the labour movement is best illustrated by looking at the response of Labour's most devoted exponent of parliamentarism, MacDonald. He warned against any blanket condemnation of direct action, which could have dire consequences for the Labour Party and parliament:

I would warn the Parliamentary Party that its duty is not to wash its hands in public of responsibility for the spontaneous actions of men - especially young impatient men who are keeping the spirit of independence alive - who may be rash and impulsive. If the Parliamentary leaders cannot keep a grip on the whole movement two things will happen. Confidence in Parliament will become less than it now is, and the Parliamentary party will suffer the fate of the Irish Nationalists when they mistook the significance of Sinn Féin.⁷³

In his diary he worried that he himself had been guilty of such: 'I feel unhappy lest I have gone too far in the other direction, and have encouraged passive obedience in democracy. That is a bad doctrine. I must do something to make my real position somewhat clearer.'⁷⁴ The outcome of this concern was Parliament and Revolution, in which he attempted to seek the middle ground. He wrote to Johnson, the ILP secretary:

Could you in view of the agitation in the branches and the action of some like Birmingham draw their attention in the next circular you issue to my book which is to appear on Parliament & Revolution ... [It] discusses, from the I.L.P. point of view, the Russian revolution, Dictatorship of the Proletariat, Soviets, Direct Action, Democracy.⁷⁵

70 W.C. Anderson, The Profiteers' Parliament, ILP pamphlet, new series no. 2, ILP, 1919. See Mowat, Britain Between the Wars, pp.4-7 for the election campaign.

71 MacKenzie (eds.), Diary of Beatrice Webb Vol. 3, p.329, 10 Jan 1919.

72 The Call, 27 March 1919; Labour Party, Conference Report, 1919, pp.127-130; Francis Johnson Correspondence, Johnson to Henderson, 17 April 1920, 1920/19. Harvester Press Microforms, Brighton.

73 Socialist Review, April-June 1919, p.104.

74 Stephen R. Ward, James Ramsay MacDonald: Low Born Among the High Brows, Peter Lang, New York, 1990, p.102.

75 MacDonald to Johnson, 3 Sept 1919, Francis Johnson Correspondence.

'To the Socialist,' he wrote, 'the relative merits of industrial and political action must be considered, not for the purpose of abandoning one or the other, but of assigning to each its proper place on a full attack all along the line by democracy upon capitalism.'⁷⁶ The proper place for direct action, he considered, was in support of, not in opposition to, constitutionalism: 'Because such action can never come into operation whilst Parliamentary government is fulfilling its functions as representative government: it can only be used to support representative government.'⁷⁷ This was a bid to make direct action part of a radical patriotic strategy; labour would defend the constitution against government debasement. But it was also an opportunist bid by MacDonald not to lose control of a movement that was becoming attached to political forms with which he had no sympathy.⁷⁸

To a certain extent, other opponents of direct action used a similar argument, but it lacked MacDonald's sophistication. It remained based on an idea of Britain as essentially formed by its parliamentarism. Adamson worried that industrial action, 'if not dealt with wisely and quickly will undermine the stability of the State and endanger the continued existence of this country'.⁷⁹ Likewise Brace believed that 'This island home of ours is face to face with a very serious situation in consequence of industrial unrest'.⁸⁰ For them, the threat to parliament was a threat to the nation, the former defining what was special about the latter. As Thomas said, 'I want the authority of parliament recognised as being essential to the future of the country'.⁸¹ Direct action was therefore only one of two alternatives:- the continued existence of 'this island home of ours' or something unknown, but no longer Britain. Stuart-Bunning, presiding over the 1919 Trades Union Congress, said that the choice direct action presented was either fiasco or revolution.⁸² Sexton explained the alternative in more hysterical language; direct actionists 'were letting loose an element they could not control.... He did not believe in letting mad dogs loose ... They would be ... asking for civil war in this country'.⁸³

76 MacDonald, Parliament and Revolution, p.81.

77 MacDonald, Parliament and Revolution, p.76.

78 Robert E. Dowse, 'A Note on Ramsay MacDonald and Direct Action,' Political Studies, vol. 9, 1961, pp.306-308, argues that MacDonald sincerely held this joint action view. That his only explanations of this view come in 1919 and 1920 supports the argument that opportunism rather than conviction was behind it.

79 HC Debates, 5:112, 60, 11 Feb 1919.

80 HC Debates, 5:112, 355-326, 13 Feb 1919.

81 HC Debates, 5:110, 2400, 7 Nov 1918.

82 The Times, 9 Sept 1919. The Times correspondent called Stuart-Bunning's address 'remarkable for its moderation of tone'.

83 Labour Party, Conference Report, 1919, p.120.

The moderate leaders did not win the arguments over direct action. At the 1919 Labour conference, when delegates were warned direct action was unconstitutional, Robert Williams asked in reply whether the government's war against Russia was constitutional. Another delegate was blunt, he said 'He had still to learn that because a movement was unconstitutional it was wrong.' The majority of delegates clearly agreed, for they voted 1,893,000 to 935,000 to consult the Parliamentary Committee of the TUC on 'the unreserved use of their political and industrial power'.⁸⁴ The Triple Alliance also called on the TUC Parliamentary Committee to convene a conference to discuss compelling the government to withdraw from Russia. The PC decided no conference was necessary. The September 1919 TUC conference censured the PC by referring back this section of their report by 2.5 million to 1.8 million.⁸⁵ The failure of direct action was, therefore, mainly due to the direct actionists' need to rely on the institutions of the labour movement, and their failure to build alternative rank and file organisations. The bankruptcy of such reliance was shown in the Mines for the Nation campaign, into which labour leaders diverted the movement in December 1919. It offered a direct alternative to industrial action for political ends by appealing to public opinion. Consequently, it sought a cross class alliance, stressing the benefits of coal nationalisation to the nation. Coal was 'our national heritage', 'our chief national asset', and the miners performed 'a great national service'.⁸⁶ It was pointed out that seventy three per cent of mine *managers* earned less than £400 a year, and that 'the sweating of professional and clerical staffs by the capitalist system can only be remedied by NATIONALISATION'.⁸⁷ Fifteen million such leaflets were issued, as well as tens of thousands of pamphlets, and one hundred demonstrations were held.⁸⁸ At the 1920 Labour conference, the chairman, W.H. Hutchinson, of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, pointed out that, while the campaign had failed, it had 'had a great educational value'.⁸⁹

In the end it was not the arguments of the opponents of direct action that won, but unemployment and the defeat of the Triple Alliance on Black Friday.⁹⁰ MacDonald clearly recognised this. He wrote of the Triple Alliance strike that never happened:

84 Labour Party, Conference Report, 1919, pp.117, 157, 161, 156.

85 Graubard, British Labour and the Russian Revolution, pp.72-73, 75-76.

86 Sidney Webb, 'The Black Tiger,' Leo Chiozza Money, 'Nationalisation as a Consumers' Policy,' The Mines for the Nation, The Mines for the Nation Committee, n.d., pp. 21, 13, 16.

87 Coal Nationalisation and the Middle Classes, The Mines for the Nation Campaign leaflet no. 9. n.d.

88 E. Eldon Barry, Nationalisation in British Politics, Jonathan Cape, 1965, p.243.

89 Labour Party, Conference Report, 1920, p.114.

90 See G.D.H. Cole, A History of the Labour Party since 1914, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1948, pp.112, 116-117.

It not only failed but failed ignominiously. If this disastrous venture is pondered over, and if as a result the Labour movement swings with more vigour and singleness of purpose on to the only profitable lines of steady and consistent advance, we may yet look back upon these dark days with gratitude and regard them as having been necessary for our elementary schooling.⁹¹

British Socialism and Bolshevism

Leading labour and socialist figures had already defined a British Socialism before 1914. It was evolutionary, statist, non-violent and above all parliamentary. Its nature had been reinforced by arguments about both British conditions and the national character. It had been under serious threat from syndicalism in the years 1910 to 1914, but the war had brought a temporary end to industrial unrest upon which syndicalism's strength had been based. While the majority of syndicalists opposed the war, they too had had some temporary hesitation. Tom Mann had expressed his regret that 'the workers of the world are at one another's throats,' but also stated that 'I prefer not to make any definite pronouncement.'⁹² The lack of organisation meant that syndicalism as a theory could not be combined with practice in any cohesive form. Syndicalism was submerged by the question of the war. Hence 'British Socialism' was given a reprieve from its threat.

The Bolshevik Revolution renewed the threat in a much more dangerous form for the British socialists. Bolshevism's greatest strength was that it worked. A socialist government was in place for the first time. The moderate British labour leaders recognised the continuities of their fight against revolutionism (and left-wing reformism). MacDonald wrote in 1919

Is there a single person who has been in the Socialist movement for 20 years who, looking back, is not saddened by the long disrupting controversies raised by mere will-o'-the-wisps who to-day are forgotten and disgraced, but who in their time distracted the movement, dazzled it with their marsh flares, and misled it by their antics?⁹³

The fight against Bolshevism was seen as the latest incident in a long running ideological battle. There had been the revolutionism of the SDF, syndicalism and

91 Socialist Review, July-Sept 1921, in Richard W. Lyman, 'James Ramsay MacDonald and the Leadership of the Labour Party, 1918-22,' Journal of British Studies, vol. II, no. 1, 1962, pp.138-139.

92 Daily Herald, 27 Aug 1914, in Chushichi Tsuzuki, Tom Mann, 1856-1941 The Challenges of Labour, Clarendon, Oxford, 1991, pp.177-178.

93 MacDonald, Parliament and Revolution, p.3. For MacDonald's view of the ILP's struggle against its own left wing see his pamphlet written for ILP study circles which educated new members in the politics of the leadership, The Story of the ILP and What It Stands For, third edition, ILP Information Committee, 1924, pp.10-12.

now Bolshevism. Henderson visiting Russia after the anti-tsarist revolution on behalf of the British government also noted this continuity. In a letter he remarked on the Russian workers and socialism:

The men are not content with asking for reasonable advances ... but their demands are so extravagant that it is obvious that they are prompted not so much with a desire for economic improvement as to secure a complete change in the control of industry. They want to introduce a form of syndicalism ...⁹⁴

It was to prevent the victory of such forces in Russia that he returned from Russia committed to attendance at the Stockholm conference; it was to avert the threat of such forces in Britain that he returned from Russia committed to framing a new programme for the Labour Party.⁹⁵

While the war lasted, reactions to the Bolshevik Revolution were determined by attitudes to the war. Anti-war groups saw the Bolsheviks as a force for peace, especially after the publication of the secret treaties. Pro-war Labour delegates sang 'For He's a Jolly Good Fellow' to Kerensky at their June 1918 conference, after he had told them that the Bolsheviks represented 'the vanguard of the triumphant German imperialism'.⁹⁶

The end of the war allowed the conflict between reformism and revolutionism into the open, uncomplicated by the issue of world war. In February 1919 the Second International was relaunched at Berne. Branting of the Swedish social democrats moved a resolution on democracy and dictatorship contrasting western parliamentary socialism to Bolshevism. It declared that

A reorganised society more and more permeated with Socialism cannot be realised, much less permanently established, unless it rests upon the triumphs of Democracy and is rooted in the principles of liberty. Those institutions which constitute Democracy - freedom of speech, and of the Press, the right of assembly, universal suffrage, a Government responsible to Parliament, with arrangements guaranteeing popular cooperation and respect for the wishes of the people, the right of association, etc., - these also provide the working classes with the means of carrying on the class struggle.⁹⁷

This resolution laid down the basic arguments upon which British moderates were to defend their own socialism and attack Bolshevism. The significance of the resolution is that it shows that this conflict occurred across Europe, yet British

94 McKibbin, The Evolution of the Labour Party, p.92.

95 J.M. Winter, 'Arthur Henderson, the Russian Revolution, and the Reconstruction of the Labour Party,' Historical Journal, vol. 15, no. 4, 1972, pp.753-773. The joint motive of making Labour a party capable of challenging for government is dealt with below, chapter 9.

96 Labour Party, Conference Report, June 1918, pp.60-61. See also Graubard, British Labour and the Russian Revolution, pp.57-62.

97 International Socialism and World Peace: Resolutions of the Berne Conference February 1919, ILP pamphlet, new series no. 1, ILP, 1919, pp.6-7.

moderates were to frame their own arguments in a British context, despite their leading involvement in the Second International. MacDonald explained that 'The whole Second International is anti-Bolshevist. It is indeed the only real bulwark against Bolshevism short of military executions.'⁹⁸ The weakness of European moderate reformist parties left the British Labour Party as the major anti-Bolshevik party in Europe; the International's secretariat was moved to London in recognition of this. Of the August 1920 congress at Geneva, the International's own report declared:

What distinguishes this Congress clearly from those which have preceded it is the attitude of open combat adopted towards Bolshevism. Not only is all hope of conciliation dead forever, but both from the political and economic standpoint the programme of the Second International is constantly in contrast to the Bolshevik programme. London and Moscow are henceforth two antagonistic forces struggling for supremacy over the working masses: two poles around which the Socialist forces will crystallise.⁹⁹

It is this conflict which is examined here, though the emphasis is upon the debate inside the British left.

There were major difficulties for the moderates in the fight against Bolshevism. Allied intervention in Soviet Russia meant that moderates had to take care not to be seen to be siding with the Allies, and many were loath to attack Bolshevism while Russia was under attack. R.C. Wallhead, chairman of the ILP, explained that

I am continually being asked whether I have any criticism to offer of the Soviet system of government. My answer is that until an honourable peace with Russia has been duly ratified I do not propose to utter any criticism which could be misconstrued and made use of by the enemies of the Russian people.¹⁰⁰

Also, the ILP, which had been the main source of ideas about what constituted British Socialism was in a state of flux in the years immediately after the First World War. The membership was rising considerably, but people were joining a party which seemed to have lost touch with its traditional politics. This can be illustrated in three ways. Firstly, the ILP was publishing pamphlets praising the Russian Revolution and Bolshevism. Joseph King wrote two pamphlets giving sympathetic accounts of Bolshevism, pointing out that the Bolshevik revolution, while it had used force, had been effected largely without bloodshed.¹⁰¹ A.W. Humphrey described Lenin, Trotsky and Tchitcherine [*sic*] (the soviet foreign affairs

98 Labour Leader, 14 Aug 1919.

99 Graubard, British Labour and the Russian Revolution, p.199.

100 Labour Leader, 12 Aug 1920.

101 Joseph King, Bolshevism and Bolsheviks, ILP pamphlet, new series no. 13, ILP, 1919, p.18; See also, Joseph King, Soviets, ILP pamphlet, new series no. 7, ILP, 1919.

commissar) as having given 'long and arduous years of service in the cause of freedom, in which not only liberty but life itself was risked.' He quoted an American war correspondent who reported that the soviets 'represent 95 per cent. of the people'.¹⁰² An ILP leaflet quoted Churchill calling Bolshevism 'a league of the failures, the criminals, the unfit, the mutinous, the morbid, the deranged, and the distraught in every land'. It contrasted this statement with the facts that the number of universities in Russia had risen from six to sixteen, the number of students at Moscow university had doubled, 180,000 school children received free meals daily, and that the theatres were crowded and the churches were open.¹⁰³ The ILP published Lenin on The Land Revolution in Russia, with a foreword by Snowden explaining his 'pleasure in presenting these important documents to British readers on account not only of their historical interest, but because of their practical value'.¹⁰⁴ The Manifesto of the Moscow International was published 'in order to make available to the general body of Socialists a document of great interest and importance'.¹⁰⁵ Secondly, the attitude of Snowden, chairman of the ILP, is illustrative. At the time of the Bolshevik insurrection he said 'The Extremists have captured the Government,' but within a month he decided that 'The Bolsheviks are far more representative of Russian opinion than we had been led to believe from prejudiced reports which have appeared in the British press.'¹⁰⁶ In mid-1918 he explained that 'the expectations of those who believed and declared that the Bolsheviks had usurped authority by force in opposition to the wishes of the Russian people have been falsified by the facts'.¹⁰⁷ His address from the chair at the 1919 ILP conference referred to 'great revolutionary changes ... on the continent of Europe,' and proclaimed that 'we will not betray our comrades in other lands who are dying for international Socialism'.¹⁰⁸ Third, ILP conferences voted against accepting the Branting resolution by 290 to 203 votes in 1919, and voted for disaffiliation from the Second International by 529 to 144 in 1920. Almost a third of delegates voted for immediate affiliation to the Third International, and two-thirds voted for consultations about affiliation.¹⁰⁹ G.D.H. Cole perhaps best characterised the position of the ILP towards the Russian Revolution. 'The ILP was sharply divided,' he commented. 'Its best known leaders more and more anti-Bolshevik as the

- 102 A.W. Humphrey, The Allies' Crime Against Russia: An Exposure of a Capitalist Conspiracy, ILP pamphlet, new series no. 11, ILP, 1919, pp.4, 11.
- 103 ILP, Bolshevism!, National Labour Press, Manchester, n.d. 1919.
- 104 Lenin, The Land Revolution in Russia, ILP, 1919.
- 105 The Manifesto of the Moscow International, National Labour Press, Manchester, n.d.
- 106 Labour Leader, 15 Nov, 6 Dec 1917.
- 107 Labour Leader, 23 May 1918.
- 108 Cross, Philip Snowden, pp.172-173.
- 109 ILP, Conference Reports, 1919, p.68; 1920, p.86.

character of the second Revolution became more plain, the rank and file somewhat bewildered and for the most part wishful to go leftward without ceasing to be a parliamentary party working within to the Labour Party on constitutional lines.¹¹⁰

Under the twin threats of direct action and Bolshevism, the moderates had to reconstruct British Socialism. Snowden had, by the late summer of 1919, become anti-Bolshevik, and warned of the effects of Bolshevism on the ILP. He warned that 'unless the N.A.C. takes some steps at once to protect the branches from this insidious propaganda, the disruption of the Movement is inevitable.' He recommended sending out a memorandum to branches warning against 'novel and untried theories and experiments', restating the ILP's policy as 'the education of the people in the use of the Parliamentary and municipal vote', and pointing out that 'It is the duty of every branch and every member to advocate this policy and to be loyal to it both in teaching and deed.'¹¹¹ This prompted the ILP to undertake a campaign against Bolshevism in the party. The major argument used was quite negative and quite simple. It was argued that, while revolution was supposedly applicable to all countries, this was not the case, for, while socialism was internationally applicable, 'the political and historical developments and genius of each country will determine the exact form which the transition will take'.¹¹² From this position, and in a variety of forms, it was simply argued that Russia was not Britain. One pamphlet pointed out that 'Recent events in Russia have given a new lease of life to the revolutionary idea, for it is asked, "If this success can be achieved in Russia, why not in this country?"' The writer's answer was simple: 'Conditions are different in this country.'¹¹³ Arthur Ponsonby preferred to stress the Russian-ness of revolution:

The Russian experiment, apart from the fact that it cannot so far be regarded as an unqualified success, is essentially and absolutely a *Russian* experiment evolved from Russian conditions, carried out by Russian methods, and adapted to the Russian psychology.¹¹⁴

MacDonald argued in the same way. Of the Russian Revolution he wrote, 'It is Russian. Its historical setting and parentage is Russia; the economic state in which it is is Russia.'¹¹⁵ If having been established that the Russian Revolution was essentially Russian, it was argued that Russia was not Britain. 'Russia is not

110 Cole, A History of the Labour Party, p.41.

111 Snowden to NAC members, 29 Aug 1919; Memorandum for branches, ILP Papers 3, NAC Minutes, Item 11, 113, 114-117, BLPES.

112 'Draft Memorandum on Socialism and Government' (for submission to Geneva Conference, Feb 1920), ILP 3, Item 11, 166-172, BLPES.

113 H.C. Shears, Socialist Policy: Reform or Revolution?, ILP pamphlet, new series no. 17, ILP, 1919, p.3.

114 Labour Leader, 28 Sept 1920. Original emphasis.

115 MacDonald, Parliament and Revolution, p.98.

England,' the ILP executive told members, 'The social and political history and conditions of the two countries are different.'¹¹⁶ The advantage to this line of argument was that it implied no criticism of the Bolsheviks in Russia, but only of the application of their methods to Britain. As Ponsonby put it, 'Oranges are excellent fruit, but you can't grow them in England.'¹¹⁷

The response of those who called themselves 'British Bolsheviks' was contemptuous of such arguments. They called them un-socialist. The Left Wing of the ILP said of the moderate leadership that

To argue that what is good for Russia is not good for Britain, and what is good for Britain is not good for China, is the very negation of international Socialism which seeks a new international mode of life to replace capitalism which, in its essentials is uniform and universal in all the countries of the world.¹¹⁸

Likewise, the BSP pointed out that 'Russia may be different from Great Britain, but the yoke which weighs upon the neck of the working class is exactly the same, and the method of throwing it off is also the same.'¹¹⁹ They also had a different conception of history from the moderates. The Left Wing of the ILP said that the moderates' wish for gradual change stood 'in an evident ignorance of the lessons of our own nation's history,' and J.T. Walton Newbold wondered why a statue of Cromwell stood outside Westminster Hall if change in Britain was so peaceful.¹²⁰ At the 1920 ILP conference, he claimed that 'he had never founded his revolutionary Socialism upon the experience of his Russian comrades, but upon his study of English history.' C.H. Norman supported him saying that both Magna Carta and the Bill of Rights had been won by revolution.¹²¹

Theodore Rothstein wrote in The Call that from having read Russian, Austrian, Hungarian and German papers he had concluded that 'The truth is, every country can claim exemption from the operation of social and historical forces on the plea of "peculiarities", since every country is "peculiar".' He set out to define what the view of British peculiarity was, presenting the reformist view as:

Britain, they say, is different from the Continent. Britain has a 600-year old Parliament, its people have been wedded for centuries almost to Parliamentary methods of political warfare, and, last but not least, our ruling class are differently constituted, mentally and morally, from the ruling classes abroad, inasmuch as they have learnt the wisdom of yielding and compromising to a degree unknown else-

116 ILP 3, Item 11, 160-163, BLPES.

117 Labour Leader, 28 Sept 1920.

118 Left Wing of the ILP, 'Explanatory Notes on the Second International versus the Third International,' ILP 3, Item 61, BLPES.

119 The Call, 14 Feb 1918.

120 Left Wing of the ILP, 'The Call of the Third International,' ILP 3, Item 61, BLPES; Labour Leader, 18 Sept 1919.

121 ILP, Conference Report, 1920, pp.73, 74.

where. Should they, it is argued, find themselves one day confronted with the determined will of the people in the shape of a Labour or Socialist majority in Parliament, they 'will be off and say no more'.¹²²

Rothstein's characterisation of the moderates' view was essentially accurate. There was a general belief that Britain was the most democratic country in the world, and that Labour simply needed a parliamentary majority to be representative of the nation. The Webbs, in their contribution to the debate on political methods requested by the Second International, put this belief in their usual unsentimental way. They praised 'the particular advantages of the political institutions of the Democracy of Great Britain' and its creators, including Fox and Grey, Cobden and Bright, Gladstone and Chamberlain, 'honest enthusiasts in the cause of liberty'. They explained that 'The British Constitution as it now stands, notwithstanding all its manifold imperfections ... has, in fact, secured a larger participation, a more continuous interest and a more widespread influence in Parliamentary elections than can be found in any other great nation.' They noted how Parliament had acted upon the national political character, leading to the acceptance by all parties of the 'public judgement and the public conscience'.¹²³ George Benson of Salford ILP condemned English Bolsheviks because they wished to destroy 'the whole of the English political system which is rooted in our national life by the tradition of seven centuries, and in its place establish something utterly alien to our experience'.¹²⁴ It was this conception of an evolutionary parliamentary Britain that the Labour Party and ILP leaders saw themselves defending. They expressed this both privately and publicly. Sidney Webb wrote to Sir Oliver Lodge that

This country is going through a period of grave peril, industrially. There is an ugly temper abroad (not in the Labour Party, and, in fact, in revolt against the constitutional parliamentarianism of the Labour Party.) The best safeguard against 'Bolshevism' is a strong Labour Party in Parliament, voicing the discontent and bringing to light the grievances of the masses.... If you *want* a Bolshevik revolution in this country, the surest way to get it is to succeed in eliminating or discrediting the Labour Party! It is not too much to say that the survival of any popular respect for Parliamentary institutions *depends* on there continuing to be a strong and independent Parliamentary Labour Party, functioning as 'H.M. Opposition'.¹²⁵

122 The Call, 17 April 1919. Rothstein wrote under the name John Bryan. His conclusion about such national differences was that 'underlying all peculiarities are the same social factors - modern industry, capitalism, proletariat, and, now, the world war - which are bound to produce the same effects,' that is revolution.

123 Sidney and Beatrice Webb, A Constitution for the Socialist Commonwealth of Great Britain, London School of Economics/Cambridge UP, Cambridge, 1975, first published 1920, pp.87, 88,89.

124 Labour Leader, 22 Jan 1920.

125 The Letters of Sidney and Beatrice Webb Volume III Pilgrimage 1912-1947, edited by Norman MacKenzie, Cambridge UP/London School of Economics and Political Science, Cambridge, 1978, p.111, 26 Nov 1918. Original emphasis. Webb's election address, which he enclosed with this letter, said much the same thing, p.113.

Opposition to Intervention in Russia

For the labour movement the years 1919 to 1921 were dominated by the issues of direct action and attitudes to Bolshevism. These issues came together in the opposition to British intervention in Soviet Russia. The language of radical patriotism, though not necessarily the ideas behind it, were largely absent from this discourse. The Allied intervention was seen as an attack on socialism by capitalism, even by those on the left who opposed Bolshevism. An ILP pamphlet declared:

It is the assassination of the Russian Republic which we must prevent. The fall of the Soviet Republic would be the signal for a re-doubling of the effort by the forces of Capitalism, Imperialism, Militarism and Monarchism to make the new world a new slavery. Russia is holding up the light. She has put Capitalism behind her.¹²⁶

Even MacDonald, a bitter opponent of Bolshevism, declared that 'The crushing of Lenin is not only the destruction of his government (a small thing), but the re-establishment in Russia and in Europe of the old order of exploitation and of the subjection of the working class.'¹²⁷ This may have been opportunism on MacDonald's part, but this in itself would suggest the strength of pro-Soviet feeling on the British left. The ILP executive in January and June 1919 urged branches to keep up agitation against intervention in Russia. Demonstrations were held in July 1919, and a special Labour Leader edition on Soviet Russia was published.¹²⁸ It was the fact that Russia was a socialist country that removed old-style radical patriotic vocabulary, for the left still used such terms in relation to British intervention in Ireland. Vernon Hartshorn moved a resolution condemning British actions in Ireland, including the jailing of a professional singer for two years for singing a nationalist song. He called such actions a 'stain which is besmirching our reputation'. 'The Labour Party feel,' he said, 'and I hope all Britishers feel, that the state of things which now exists in Ireland is no credit to this country or to the British Government.'¹²⁹ Henderson, the following year, showed how radical patriotism and traditional patriotism had come together in the war, as he spoke of a betrayal of the high feelings of patriotism engendered by war:

A policy of military terrorism has been inaugurated, which in our opinion, is not merely a betrayal of democratic principles and not only a betrayal of the things for which we claimed to stand during the five years great world war, but is utterly opposed to the best traditions of the British people. Such a policy, it seems to me,

126 A.W. Humphrey, The Allies' Crime Against Russia, p.24.

127 Socialist Review, July-Sept 1919, p.205.

128 Circular to branches, 15 Jan 1919; NAC minutes, 22-23 June 1919, ILP 3, Item 11.

129 HC Debates, 5:115, 1694-1696, 14 May 1919.

can only be characterised as being akin to the policy of frightfulness which was associated with the doings of the Germans, and the doings of him whom we described as the Hun during the War.¹³⁰

The Labour Party stated that the Government's policy in Ireland filled 'with burning shame all people, irrespective of Party, who have followed the recent course of events in that unhappy country, and is an indelible stain on the fair name of the liberty-loving people of Britain'.¹³¹ Labour were not alone in using such arguments. D.G. Boyce has explained the opposition to the Coalition government's repressive policy in Ireland: 'Reprisals hit Englishmen's sense of justice and fair play; they also wounded their pride.'¹³² This suggests that two sets of terminology could be held simultaneously and reserved for separate occasions.¹³³

It can also be suggested that different sections of the left had different motives but a unity in practice. This was certainly the case in relation to the formation of the Council of Action in August 1920.¹³⁴ This brought the spectacle of Thomas, the arch-moderate, calling for 'a challenge to the whole constitution of the country'.¹³⁵ But moderates were keen to stress that labour's actions implied no sympathy for the Communist form of government. Clynes tripped over his own tongue as he tried to make this position clear in the Commons:

We must not, I say, be taken as approving, in any way, I am not saying at all, but most of the methods or principles of the Government upon which now the affairs of Russia rest. We must not be taken as approving them. It is not necessary to approve the present system of Government in Russia to justify the case which we present against the Government here for military intervention between Poland and Russia. It is not necessary to approve all that is occurring, and has occurred, in Bolshevik Russia in order to do everything possible to prevent the recurrence of a new European war. That, then, is the Labour position.¹³⁶

130 HC Debates, 5:133, 925, 20 Oct 1920.

131 An Appeal to the British Nation by the Labour Party, Labour Party, 1920, p.4.

132 D.G. Boyce, Englishmen and Irish Troubles: British Public Opinion and the Making of Irish Policy 1918-22, Jonathan Cape, 1972, p.99.

133 An interesting exchange on direct action and Ireland took place between Clynes and a delegate at the special TUC conference in March 1920. Clynes declared that 'Force [direct action], as it is now proposed to apply it, is not a British characteristic.' A delegate heckled, 'What about Ireland?' to which Clynes replied: 'The force employed in Ireland does not rest on British character; it rests on the folly of British tradition.' What he meant is unclear, but it showed the confusion surrounding ideas of national character. He certainly satisfied some delegates for he was cheered, see The Times, 12 March 1920.

134 For the events surrounding this see L.J. MacFarlane, "'Hands Off Russia", British Labour and the Russo-Polish War, 1920,' Past and Present, no. 38, 1967, pp.126-152, and Graubard, British Labour and the Russian Revolution, chapter 5.

135 Report of the Special Conference on Labour and the Russian-Polish War, Council of Action, n.d.

136 HC Debates, 5:133, 281, 10 Aug 1920.

The moderates were prepared to go so far in August 1920, themselves advocating a 'down tools' policy, because they felt they were voicing the overwhelming desire for peace of the nation. Clynes told the Council of Action conference on 13 August that 'we have felt that we were acting and speaking not merely for the Labour Movement, but that we were moulding and interpreting what we felt to be national opinion.'¹³⁷ Beatrice Webb believed Labour had the support of 'many non-Labour elements - all the middle-class pacifists and many middle-class taxpayers'.¹³⁸ The moderates felt they were representing the people against the government. One expression of this was Henderson's telegram to local Labour Parties calling for 'citizen demonstrations' on Sunday 8 August. This both avoided an appeal to workers as workers, and prevented immediate strike action.¹³⁹ Likewise, MacDonald portrayed the Council of Action as defender of the British constitution:

Thus when people talk of this Council being unconstitutional, they talk nonsense. Everything necessary to protect the Constitution is constitutional, if constitutional means anything at all except passive obedience to any outrageous acts done by men who happen to be Ministers. That Ministers should secure majorities by fraud and use them without reference to the national will and govern as though public affairs were their personal and private concern is the very antithesis of constitutional government.¹⁴⁰

Clynes too declared that the Council of Action 'was not challenging the Constitution, but requiring our Government to conform to it'.¹⁴¹

The hypocrisy and duplicity of the government also played a part in both the massive support for labour's position and in the lengths the moderates were prepared to go. The British left, from Radical Liberals to socialist revolutionaries, had always been extremely hostile to tsarism. British intervention could only be seen as an attempt at restoration of tsarism and capitalism. Snowden, in early 1919, had said, 'The Allied war upon Russia is not a war against Bolshevik excesses, for the Allied Governments were the bosom friends of the late tsarist regime, which committed greater diabolical outrages in a day than the Bolsheviks have committed in a year in a state of revolution. But it is a war upon the philosophy of social democracy.'¹⁴² Only a month before the Council of Action was formed, the Daily Herald had published a secret document reporting conversations in which Churchill offered a White general 10,000 volunteers for the fight against Bolshevism.¹⁴³ Pontypridd

137 Council of Action, Report of the Special Conference, p.12.

138 MacKenzie (eds.), Diary of Beatrice Webb vol. 3, p.363, 20 Aug 1920.

139 Labour Party, Conference Report, 1921, p.11. Emphasis added.

140 MacFarlane, "'Hands Off Russia,'" p.147.

141 The Times, 20 Aug 1920.

142 Graubard, British Labour and the Russian Revolution, pp.70-71.

143 See George Lansbury, The Miracle of Fleet Street: The Story of the Daily Herald, Victoria House Printing Co. and Labour Publishing Co., n.d., pp.127-132.

Trades and Labour Council had, responded to these revelations by calling 'on the Government to place [Churchill] on trial for high treason'.¹⁴⁴ Such events, combined with the overwhelming desire to prevent another war, ensured labour would receive massive support. The Communist R. Palme Dutt called the agitation 'simply a popular expression of war-weariness and horror at the prospect of being dragged into another war'.¹⁴⁵ The Home Office Intelligence reports agreed; the Councils had appeared because of the 'general fear of war that exists in the lower middle and working classes, and [were] not [due] to any tenderness for Russia'.¹⁴⁶

Graubard has argued that Labour's policy towards Russia, both before, during and after August 1920, was determined by 'an identity of status' as underdogs. Russia stood against the capitalist world and Labour stood against the British capitalist parties, and both were excoriated for their alleged unfitness to govern.¹⁴⁷ However, Stephen White has called this thesis unsustainable. He argues that labour's actions in 1920 had nothing to do with sympathy for Russia, but were solely about avoiding both the financial burden and loss of life that would result from war. He argues that there was little pro-Soviet feeling on the British left, and that policy towards Russia, including trade and recognition, was based on combatting unemployment and on the influence of ex-Liberals on the foreign policy of the Labour Party.¹⁴⁸ It is argued here that it is correct to see the success of the Council of Action agitation as dependant on war-weariness, but that an essential ingredient was the 'transferred nationalism' of a significant section of the left-wing activists, who were responsible for the establishment of 350 local councils of action.¹⁴⁹ The levels of activity of these local councils of action varied considerably. At Merthyr Tydfil, the Labour Pioneer hailed the local council as 'an important instrument for the emancipation of the workers'. It co-operated with other local radical organisations, and issued a circular to other councils stressing the links between the agitations on Russia, Ireland and unemployment. In Sussex, three local councils were set up, at East Grinstead, where 11 shillings was collected at an open air meeting, at Uckfield and at Haywards Heath. Aberdeen Trades Council supported a demonstration called by the local 'Hands Off Russia' Committee, and sent a telegram to the Prime Minister, Foreign Secretary and local MPs threatening direct action in the event of war, and

144 Pontypridd Labour Party Minute Book, 30 July 1920, E.P. Microforms, Wakefield, 1980.

145 The Communist, 19 Aug 1920, in MacFarlane, "'Hands Off Russia,'" p.151.

146 Cabinet Paper CP 1793, 19 Aug 1920, Cab 24/110, in Stephen White, Britain and the Bolshevik Revolution, Macmillan, London and Basingstoke, 1979, p.49.

147 Graubard, British Labour and the Russian Revolution, p.242, 243.

148 White, Britain and the Bolshevik Revolution, pp.204-205, 28, 241-243.

149 The phrase is George Orwell's, see his 'Notes on Nationalism,' (1945) in The Penguin Essays of George Orwell, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1984, pp.306-323.

demanding 'the immediate raising of the Blockade and resumption of trading relations with "Soviet Russia".' It then co-operated with other local bodies in forming a council of action. These examples suggest some activity from local councils. In Edinburgh, however, the trades council decided in August that it would act as the local council of action until a local conference could be called. In October it was still delaying the calling of such a conference, months after the reasons for its existence had receded. How many of the 350 local councils had only the same level of existence as that at Edinburgh is unclear. But if there is little evidence of unconditional support for the soviet system, neither is there much evidence that local councils of action saw themselves as MacDonald's defenders of the British constitution.¹⁵⁰ Certainly the Communist Party and its predecessors in the BSP, Workers' Socialist Federation, Socialist Labour Party and smaller groups were unconditional in their support for Soviet Russia. The BSP, as early as February 1918, had urged the British working class to 'learn to speak Russian', by setting up a Labour Convention, 'an anti-Parliament, as the great Chartist conventions were, and then we shall soon see how easily Russian can be spoken in these islands without the knowledge of grammar or vocabulary'.¹⁵¹ The membership of the Communist Party of Great Britain, finally united in January 1921, may have only had a membership of 3,000, but The Communist, its weekly paper, sold about 50,000 copies.¹⁵²

The largest circulation newspaper of the left, the Daily Herald, under the editorship of George Lansbury, gave much support to Soviet Russia. The circulation of over 300,000 was recognised as important by the Russian Government. Litvinov, representative of the Russian Government in Britain, wrote to Chicherin, the Russian foreign secretary, that 'in Russian questions it acts as if it were our organ,' and recommended that money be supplied to keep it going. The British government exposed this offer of help, and the money (in the form of tsarist jewels) was rejected by a majority of the board of management, despite Lansbury and the majority of the readership recommending acceptance.¹⁵³ Lansbury had visited Russia in early 1920 and sent glowing accounts back to the Herald, one of whose writers noted that his

150 White, Britain and the Bolshevik Revolution, pp.46-47; Sussex Divisional Labour Party Minutes, 16 Aug, 11 Sept 1920, Archives Collection Miscellaneous 488, BLPES; Aberdeen Trades Council Minutes, 8, 11 and 15 Aug 1920, Microform Ltd., Wakefield; Edinburgh Trades Council Minutes, 17 Aug, 3 Sept, 3 Oct 1920, E.P. Microform, Wakefield.

151 The Call, 14 Feb 1918.

152 Morton H. Cowden, Russian Bolshevism and British Labour 1917-1921, Columbia UP, New York, 1984, pp.156-157.

153 Cowden, Russian Bolshevism and British Labour, pp.106-107.

critics were calling him 'the self-elected Messiah of British Bolshevism'.¹⁵⁴ Lansbury explained why he went to Russia in What I Saw in Russia, the book he published on his return:

I did not go to Russia as a cold-blooded investigator seeking to discover what there was of evil; I went as a Socialist, to see what a Socialist revolution looks like at close quarters; and, above everything else, to look at the faces of those who had made the revolution. It was the spirit moving the men and women responsible for the revolution I wanted to discover, for all else is of no importance.¹⁵⁵

Lansbury rejected the violence associated with revolution, though like most of the British left, accepted its necessity in the context of tsarism. It was violent revolution in Britain that most of the left opposed. Clifford Allen, another visitor to Russia in 1920, wrote, 'I feel such a profound sympathy for all the experiments and sacrifices which have taken place in Russia,' and recommended the ILP's affiliation to the Third International if it could reject violence.¹⁵⁶ The report of the Labour Party delegation to Russia in May 1920 also presented a sympathetic account of Soviet Russia, condemning the capitalist press's 'perversions of the facts'. Hunger and suffering in Russia, they said, was caused not by the Bolsheviks, but by the Allied blockade, which should be lifted at once. That is not to say that they were totally uncritical, for they condemned the lack of personal freedom and the methods of the Communist Party.¹⁵⁷ Margaret Bondfield's account of her visit with the delegation is largely sympathetic, and she was to write later that 'We found nothing in Russia to justify the policy of making war on her.'¹⁵⁸ Ethel Snowden, another member of the delegation, was more critical upon her return. She wrote:

I am not hostile to the Russian Revolution which the tyrannous regime of the Czars made necessary and inevitable; but I am utterly opposed to the *coup d'état* of the Bolsheviks, as I should be to the seizing of power by any small minority of the people; for out of this action has sprung a large part of the misery the unhappy people of Russia endure.¹⁵⁹

154 Daily Herald, 3 April 1920. For a combination of Lansbury's praise of the Russian experiment and English patriotism, see 'The Dayspring in Russia,' Daily Herald, 18 March 1920, where he recounts how 'in the midst of the whirl through Petrograd I had another vision - it was Harwich and London, dear old East London, and almost cried out for home.... For all my love of England and home, I am more a Socialist, more an Internationalist, than ever before.'

155 Graubard, British Labour and the Russian Revolution, pp.212-213.

156 Arthur Marwick, Clifford Allen: the Open Conspirator, Oliver and Boyd, Edinburgh and London, 1964, p.61; ILP, Conference Report, 1921, p.60.

157 Report of the British Labour Delegation to Russia, July 1920, in Bealey, Social and Political Thought of the Labour Party, pp.8-9.

158 Margaret Bondfield, A Life's Work, Hutchinson, n.d., p.234. She reprints much of her Russian diary in chapters 11 and 12.

159 Ethel Snowden, Through Bolshevik Russia, Cassell, 1920, p.11.

Her account contained contradiction after contradiction, for, after a few pages, she said the standard of living in Russia was most affected by the 'cruel effects of the blockade'. She 'deplored' anti-semitism, but continued that 'the Russian people in the main are unaccustomed to freedom, and by their nature and temperament are proper material for the exercise of the educated, dominating Jew.'¹⁶⁰ That Lloyd George quoted her to condemn Bolshevism in the House of Commons brought much criticism upon her from the left, and at the 1921 ILP conference just under 200 delegates voted against her nomination to the Labour Party executive because 'she had criticised the Russian Republic in an unfair and unfortunate way.' Despite 235 delegates backing her, the opposition was enough to prevent her nomination.¹⁶¹ An earlier ILP conference had voted by 290 to 203 against any criticism of the Bolsheviks.¹⁶²

Undoubtedly ex-Liberals played a major part in framing Labour's foreign policy as White argues, but like labour, radical Liberals had always shared a hostility towards tsarism.¹⁶³ When Edward VII had removed Hardie and Grayson from his 1908 garden party list, Arthur Ponsonby's name had also been removed.¹⁶⁴ Ex-Liberals like Joseph King and Colonel Malone became champions of Bolshevik Russia. Communists, British and Russian, acknowledged the role of such men with gratitude. Rothstein called E.D. Morel 'better than all the Socialists', and Russia's representative in Britain thanked Ponsonby 'personally and in the name of the workers of the Soviet Union, for your sympathy and your efforts'.¹⁶⁵ The foreign policy framed by ex-Liberals did not meet opposition within the Labour Party; indeed their expertise was welcomed.

Likewise, unemployment clearly played a part in Labour's policy towards Russia, but the enthusiasm with which the idea of trade with Russia was embraced can only be explained by some vague notion of solidarity. Labour thinkers saw international disunity as the major cause of unemployment, but it was Russia that was continually named as the most victimised country. At a special conference on Ireland, the Labour executive allowed the following resolution to be moved:

The growing volume of unemployment and under-employment is due in a large measure to the interruption in world trading following on the war and the defective

160 Snowden, Through Bolshevik Russia, pp.15, 27-29.

161 ILP, Conference Report, 1921, pp.100-102. For Lloyd George see HC Debates, 5:133, 266.

162 ILP, Conference Report, 1919, p.68.

163 White, Britain and the Bolshevik Revolution, pp.216-223.

164 Caroline Benn, Keir Hardie, Hutchinson, 1992, p.240.

165 White, Britain and the Bolshevik Revolution, p.223.

peace treaties, in addition to the folly of British and Allied policy in relation to the Soviet Government of Russia.

From this resolution came a joint committee on unemployment, which recommended 'the immediate adoption of the policy of unobstructed trade with Russia'.¹⁶⁶ It is hard to believe such enthusiasm for international trade could have been achieved had Russia not been perceived as a socialist or workers' nation. This was the key point. As Councillor H. Sykes, chairman of Woolwich Labour Party, explained at the time of the Councils of Action agitation, 'If we war with Russia we shall be warring with a country that is ruled by the workers.'¹⁶⁷

* * * * *

The First World War and its aftermath had contradictory but simultaneous effects upon the discourse of the British left. Many Labour and trade union leaders had been drawn into the state, reinforcing their view of its benevolent and neutral role, and of the coincidence of parliament and nation. But the war also made the use of patriotic vocabulary less effective, since the language of class, reflecting the massive industrial unrest, came to the fore, as victory removed the restraints of wartime patriotism.

The notion of patriotism as 'my country, right or wrong' also received a major blow in the post-war years, mainly because of war-weariness, but also because many on the left now believed a workers' state existed. Whereas the Boer War had been opposed using radical patriotic language, and the First World War had been supported using both radical and traditional patriotism, the threatened war against Russia in the summer of 1920 led to a rejection of patriotic language altogether, and the use, instead, of a language of class, crossing national frontiers. While MacDonald could claim tortuously that labour was defending the constitution, the view of most on the left was that the British government wanted to reassert the international supremacy of the capitalist class. The Council of Action explained that

[T]he real object is to destroy the power of the Government of Russia and to re-establish in that country a form of government in harmony with the capitalist interest who dominate the foreign and domestic policy of European States. The workers of this country have nothing to gain by the contemplated attack on Russia.¹⁶⁸

166 Labour Party, Conference Report, 1921, pp.25, 27. See also Joint Committee on Unemployment, Unemployment: A Labour Policy, TUC/Labour Party, 1921, which named wheat and timber as being particularly useful Russian products.

167 Woolwich Pioneer, 13 Aug 1920.

168 Council of Action, Russia and Poland, 10 Aug 1920, in MacFarlane, "'Hands Off Russia,'" p.138.

The strength of such feelings is illustrated by the fact that, even when attacking Bolshevism, its opponents remained 'not unappreciative of the striking achievements of the Russian Bolshevik Party, and the genius and energy they have displayed in grappling with problems of reconstruction during the time of Civil War and foreign invasion'.¹⁶⁹

The defeat of the Triple Alliance on Black Friday, April 1921, and rising unemployment spelt the end of direct action as a serious force on the left, and allowed the moderates to reassert their traditional parliamentary strategy. The end of civil war and foreign intervention in Russia allowed attacks on Bolshevism henceforth to be conducted with real determination.

169 ILP NAC, 'A Message to the Members: The Principles of the I.L.P. and its Policy,' Dec 1919, ILP 3, Item 11, 160-163, BLPES.

Labour and the Nation 1917-1924

If Labour leaders were involved in an ideological battle inside the left, they were also concerned with portraying a new image to the world outside their ranks. The war had changed the leadership's view of themselves. Having been invited into government, they came to see the Labour Party as a potential governing party. Clynes used this fact as a major argument against direct action.¹ If Labour wanted to be a governing party, it had to act like one; effectively this meant that politics were to be fought solely in the parliamentary arena. Henderson also believed that

a new 'outlook for Labour' had been created by the Representation of the People Act and the psychological effects of the war itself. He argued that the Labour Party had to be prepared for this new situation.² The Labour Party would no longer be the pressure group of the pre-war years; the Liberal split provided Labour with its opportunity. The Labour leaders' view was that this new role could only be achieved by being a party of the nation, and not one in opposition to it. This involved a concentration upon the winning of parliamentary seats at the expense of socialist propagandising. Hence the emphasis of this analysis moves from left-wing journalists and pamphleteers to the parliamentary leaders of the Labour Party. This chapter will concentrate on Henderson, Clynes, Snowden, Thomas and, above all, MacDonald, and the way in which they sought to portray Labour as such a national party in the years between 1917 and 1924. This also reveals these leaders' views of what constituted the British nation.

Building A National Party

The first task, these leaders felt, was to explain that they were not the representatives of a single class or a sectional interest, as the very name, the Labour Party, implied.³ This was no innovation for the moderate leadership. They had been claiming this even before the war. But with improved prospects for the party in the post-war years, the claims became more urgent, and more often repeated. The

1 See p.227 below.

2 See Arthur Henderson, 'The Outlook for Labour,' Contemporary Review, vol. CXIII, Feb 1918, pp.121-130.

3 Thomas Jones recorded how, in September 1917, a group of prominent Labour figures, including Henderson, discussed the 'People's Party' as a possible name. Thomas Jones, Whitehall Diary Volume I 1916-1925, edited by Keith Middlemas, Oxford UP, 1969, pp.36-37.

Labour Party, which proclaimed itself a socialist party in 1918, also appealed to the electorate in that year on the basis of not being a class party. Henderson argued that Labour now sought 'the creation of a genuine national party'. Its aims were 'to promote the political, social, and economic emancipation of the people, and more particularly of those who depend upon their own exertions by hand or by brain for the means of life.'⁴ This phrase shows both the difficulty for Labour, and one of the ways in which it hoped to overcome that difficulty. Labour had to represent the interests of the organisations of the working class, but it also had to deny that this could conflict with its potential role as a governing party. The formula of workers by hand or by brain was supposed to broaden its representation so far that a conflict would no longer arise. Henderson therefore continued: 'This definition of Labour's aim and purpose will serve to remove the idea that the party is the party of the manual wage earners merely, and that its politics is the politics of the trade unions - a purely class conscious demand for specific improvements in wages, hours, conditions of employment.'⁵ The opening of the party to individual membership was designed to allow the entry of the workers by brain. This broadening of the party's appeal was also reflected in the party's manifestos issued in elections from 1918 to 1924 (and beyond). The 1918 and 1922 manifestos were called 'Labour's Call to the People'. In 1923 this was changed to 'Labour's Appeal to the Nation'.⁶ They stressed the comprehensive nature of Labour's appeal. In 1918, it was stressed that 'Labour's appeal to the people is not a sectional appeal, unless an appeal which excludes only militarists, profiteers, and place-hunters be regarded as sectional.'⁷ This was a view Labour leaders stressed again and again in speeches. Henderson told a Labour audience in June 1921 that Labour was 'the most comprehensive and only all-inclusive people's Party engaged in British politics ... We are not a class Party.'⁸ The Communist Party contemptuously recorded a speech made by Clynes at Battersea in 1923 in which he declared, 'The Labour Party does not stand for any class or section of society, but for all classes.'⁹

The purpose of such claims was explained by Clynes to a university extension meeting in Oxford in August 1919. 'If Labour was ever to think of itself as a controlling force in the nation,' he said, 'it must cease to think of itself in the terms of

4 Henderson, 'Outlook for Labour,' p.122.

5 Henderson, 'Outlook for Labour,' p.122.

6 F.W.S. Craig (ed.), British General Election Manifestos 1918-1966, Political Reference Publications, Chichester, 1970, pp.5, 12, 21.

7 Craig (ed.), General Election Manifestos 1918-1966, p.5.

8 Labour Party, What Labour Stands For. A Re-Statement of Policy, 1921, pp.7-8. Speeches at the annual conference demonstration, 21 June 1921.

9 Workers' Weekly, 7 April 1923.

class, as it had done hitherto. Working men could if they wished be the governing class as soon as they had convinced the nation that they were fit to govern well.¹⁰ The aim was therefore to show that Labour would not come into conflict with the nation. Philip Snowden, in his election address for the 1922 election, wanted to rebut such accusations: 'You will be told that Labour is a menace.... Labour is not a menace to anything which is honest and fair and in the best interests of the nation.'¹¹ J.H. Thomas, unveiling a war memorial in South London, was keen to provide reassurance that this was the case. He was sure that 'there was no section of men or women in any movement who really desired ill to the old country.'¹²

That Thomas should say this while honouring the war dead was significant, for Labour believed that its war service should already have secured its place in the nation, and the pro-war section of Labour were prepared to remind the nation of its role. The 1918 Labour manifesto, while calling for 'a peace of reconciliation', declared that 'victory has been achieved, and Labour claims no mean share of its achievement'.¹³ After the election, Clynes warned that to ignore 'the services of the Parliamentary [Labour] Party in the national cause ... would breed Bolshevism faster than they could destroy it'.¹⁴ The defeat of all prominent anti-war candidates in 1918 gave a warning to Labour that the war could not immediately be forgotten. Henderson could use Labour's war service to respond to Churchill's accusation of Labour's unfitness to govern, pointing out 'as positive evidence to refute Mr. Churchill's sweeping assertion ... that during the war Labour leaders without Governmental experience were called on to assume State responsibilities and had assisted in saving the nation in the hour of its dire need.'¹⁵ But in the Woolwich by-election in early 1921, when MacDonald stood for Labour, his opponent, Captain Gee, V.C., used the slogan 'A Traitor for Parliament?' to win the safe Labour seat by 700 votes.¹⁶ No doubt Gee's use of his military rank won him votes. Labour candidates likewise were not averse to using their war ranks. The list of Labour candidates for the 1922 election included a Brigadier-General (C.B. Thomson, later Lord Thomson, Secretary for Air in 1924), three Colonels, one Lieutenant-Colonel, three Majors (including Clement Attlee), five Captains and one Commander.¹⁷ As

10 The Times, 8 Aug 1919.

11 New Leader, 10 Nov 1922.

12 The Times, 16 Feb 1920.

13 Craig (ed.), General Election Manifestos 1918-1966, p.5.

14 The Times, 20 Jan 1919.

15 The Times, 9 Jan 1920.

16 David Marquand, Ramsay MacDonald, Jonathan Cape, 1977, pp.272-275.

17 Labour Party, Conference Report, 1922, pp.254-262. Of course only those commissioned could formally use their ranks.

late as 1924, during the debate on Labour's amendment to the Baldwin government's royal address, Thomas, again referring to one of Churchill's assertions, described how 'we were not defeated in this late war because Labour contributed its share as well as other people. We were not defeated because Labour showed that patriotism was not the monopoly of one class.'¹⁸ Anti-war sections of Labour could also exhibit a kind of retrospective patriotism, by expressing the demands of ex-servicemen. One could remain anti-war yet demand a fair deal for those who had fought for their country. In 1919 the National Union of Ex-Servicemen was formed, linked explicitly to Labour. Indeed a Labour Party circular to party branches instructed them to welcome the affiliation of National Union branches.¹⁹ The National Union linked the experience of war service with radical social demands, such as the claim for 'back pay' to make the soldier's wage up to six shillings a day. The National Union failed to survive its isolation by the authorities, and its failure to involve itself in the negotiations that led to the founding of the British Legion.²⁰ Nevertheless the demands of ex-servicemen could allow anti-war figures to make good on the war, especially since they could disclaim responsibility for it and the subsequent peace.²¹ MacDonald, in early 1923, received a deputation from Aberdeen British Legion, telling them that

The Labour Party would not support any unfair advantage being taken of ex-servicemen. To economize unjustly upon these men was not the policy of any honourable party. He was sorry that since 1919 those great patriots who smote their breasts with a sort of perfervid enthusiasm, and who drank the health of the men in the trenches, had forgotten a good deal about them.²²

Labour therefore aimed to show that it was a party of the nation with a proven record of service to the nation. But it did not leave it at these vague assertions. It also sought to make itself the party of all classes, to make its claim into reality. The Labour Party expanded the number of candidates from fifty-six in December 1910 (seventy-eight in January) to 361 in 1918. Whereas before the war the national executive had tried to limit candidacies, Henderson told the June 1918 conference

18 House of Commons Parliamentary Debates, Fifth Series, vol. 169, col. 414, 18 Jan 1924.

19 Labour Party circular, The Labour Party and the National Union of Ex-Servicemen, Dec 1919.

20 Graham Wootton, The Politics of Influence: British Ex-Servicemen, Cabinet Decisions and Cultural Change (1917-1957), Harvard UP, Cambridge, Mass., 1963, pp.63, 107.

21 The involvement in the politics of ex-servicemen does not of course always involve a retrospective patriotism. The Communist Party in 1927 set up the Labour League of Ex-Servicemen. Wootton has observed that it 'consisted not so much of ex-servicemen who incidentally exerted political influence as of political animals who also happened to be ex-servicemen,' The Politics of Influence, p.63.

22 The Times, 23 Jan 1923. MacDonald also mentioned ex-servicemen briefly in his Albert Hall victory speech after 1923 election, see The Times, 9 Jan 1924.

that 'they intended to impose no limit' at the next election. This attempt to expand the geographical spread of the Labour Party was not entirely successful, for the successful candidates were largely restricted to mining divisions and the north. Likewise the PLP remained the preserve of the trade unions, twenty-five from the Miners' Federation, and only eight of the sixty-one MPs were nominated by local parties or the ILP.²³ But if the 1918 election, a khaki election, did not result in the achievement of Labour's hopes, it showed their intention. The re-organisation of the Labour Party in 1918 aimed to strengthen the appeal of moderate socialism against revolutionary socialism, but a second objective was to create a party accepting the concept of, and seeking to represent, an homogenous national interest. Thus Labour and the New Social Order stated that nationalisation and control of prices were in no sense class measures, and that, with its policy of the capital levy, 'the Labour Party claims the support of four-fifths of the whole nation, for the interests of the clerk, the teacher, the doctor, the minister of religion, the average retail shopkeeper and tradesman and all those living on small incomes are identical with those of the artisan.'²⁴ It was the ILP during the war which had perceived the benefits of appealing to the middle class, though in wartime it had been particularly the middle class dissenter they had in mind.²⁵ After the war, they continued the appeal with, for example Leo Chiozza Money, himself a middle class recruit, appealing to a stratum not known for its radicalism, in a front page article called 'The Plight of the Small Shopkeeper'. He sent 'a May Day Message to the Chemist, the Milkman, and the Fishmonger', explaining 'How Capitalism Ruins and Socialism Would Save'.²⁶ Mrs C.R. Morden, in an apparent repudiation of the ILP's past, claimed that the middle class man was 'more fitted and better armed to fight Labour's battles', since 'he fights with the same weapons and speaks the same language as his enemies ... and we must remember that Labour battles are not fought at street corners, but on the floor of the House [of Commons].'²⁷ The recruitment of the middle class to Labour became a general aim of the Labour Party after its reorganisation in 1918. Ex-Liberals quickly found themselves parliamentary candidates for Labour. Clynes, as party leader, went so far as to defend private enterprise. 'That went down long ago under the weight of craftily organised Syndicates, Trusts and Combines ...' he

23 Ross McKibbin, The Evolution of the Labour Party 1910-1924, Clarendon, Oxford, 1974, pp.53, 106, 111.

24 Paul U. Kellog and Arthur Gleason, British Labor and the War, Boni and Liveright, New York, 1919, pp.385, 387, 389-390.

25 See Marvin Swartz, The Union of Democratic Control in British Politics During the First World War, Clarendon, Oxford, 1971, chapter 10.

26 Labour Leader, 1 May 1919.

27 Labour Leader, 22 Sept 1921.

explained when Lloyd George accused Labour of wishing to destroy it. 'The small trader, the struggling shopkeeper, and over-burdened middle-class man know better than the Prime Minister how completely private enterprise has been crushed out.'²⁸ The appeal to such victims was also pursued by Thomas. He was prepared to see the middle class as victim not only of big business, but of the trade unions too:

To-day you have a much larger membership of that class which falls between the millstones of the capitalist and organised manual labour. This class has no trades union, no organisation, is invariably the victim of industrial disputes. Whoever is responsible for such upheavals, the middle class man is always the victim, the man with a fixed income, who has to maintain a certain standard respectability because of his avocation or profession, who has to clothe himself well, who spends more than the worker on the education of his children. Between the capitalist and the trade unions he is crushed.

He concluded that 'the only future for the middle class man is under the rule of Labour. We welcome him into our ranks.'²⁹ Snowden too saw the position of the middle class becoming 'increasingly precarious and difficult', which led to 'many of the middle classes ... turning to the Labour Party'. But he also warned that these new supporters feared 'that the movement had got into the hands of an extreme element who were determined upon violent methods for the overthrow of society'.³⁰ Individual membership of the Labour Party, the establishment of advisory committees, the new slogan 'producers by hand or brain' and the encouragement of middle-class candidates were all aimed at widening the scope of the membership, to break free from a perceived class representation, and validate the claims of being a national party. To maintain this perceived middle class support, to remain a national party, Labour also had to stress its moderation.

There was another aspect of Labour's attempts to become a national party that had a pre-war labour and socialist tradition to put to use. This was the party's aim to expand out from its traditional urban areas of support into rural seats. McKibbin points out that Labour believed mistakenly that it had to win rural seats to form a parliamentary majority, but there was also a belief that such seats ought to be won, 'that it was the party's mission to liberate them from the feudal barons under which they were supposed to languish'.³¹ To be a truly national party, Labour felt it must represent the real, rural England.

28 Labour Leader, 31 March 1921.

29 J.H. Thomas, When Labour Rules, W. Collins Sons, 1920, pp.60, 62.

30 Philip Snowden, Labour and the New World, Waverley Books, n.d. 1921, pp.57-58.

31 McKibbin, Evolution of the Labour Party, p.151.

Labour manifestos from 1918 to 1924 all devoted a section to land and agriculture. These manifestos reveal two developments. First, they show the growing moderation of Labour's demands. The 1918 manifesto unequivocally called for land nationalisation as 'a vital necessity'. In 1922, the party called only for 'a bold policy of re-organisation', and by 1923 they sought only 'special measures'.³² When George Edwards, veteran Norfolk farm labourers' leader, was refused wage subsidies by MacDonald, the newly installed Prime Minister, Thomas Jones noted with sardonic wit 'that we were not going to see just yet the new Jerusalem set up in England's green and pleasant land'.³³ Second, they show a changing attitude to the land. By 1924 the land had become 'the countryside'.³⁴ This was a change in the image of the land, from working environment to leisure resource, which was much more in tune with Labour's image of the country as the depository of Englishness.³⁵ Thus, while Labour had practical measures - a minimum wage for agricultural labourers, state credit facilities and promotion of co-operative methods³⁶ - sentimentality is the key to understanding Labour's attitude to the country. To use Stanley Baldwin's phrase from 1924, Labour had long felt that 'England is the country and the country is England'. MacDonald could even outflank Baldwin in the use of such language in 1923. 'Protect our home market!' was Baldwin's protectionist slogan. MacDonald used images of the countryside, not of industry, to counter this slogan:

'Protect our home market!' What an insignificant phrase that is alongside of the Labour Party's policy: Develop our own country! (Cheers.) I wish, my friends, I could meet you oftener on tramp. I could take you into the open fields of any county, or stand with you on any hilltop and, pointing to the wastes, say 'There is our case!' ... If I were to describe our ideal in a phrase, I should say this:-
*We are going to develop our own country, we are going to work it for all it is worth, to bring human labour into touch with God's natural endowments, and we are going to make the land blossom like a rose and contain houses and firesides where there shall be happiness and contentment and glorious aspirations.*³⁷

Whereas practical proposals for agricultural labourers had only limited appeal, this sort of sentimentality had a much wider appeal, as the middle class climbed into

32 Craig (ed.), General Election Manifestos 1918-1966, pp.5, 13, 22.

33 Jones, Whitehall Diaries, p.270, 31 Jan 1924.

34 Craig (ed.), General Election Manifestos 1918-1966, p.35.

35 See Alex Potts, "'Constable Country" between the Wars,' in Raphael Samuel (ed.), Patriotism Volume III National Fictions, Routledge, 1989, pp.160-186 and Alun Howkins, 'The Discovery of Rural England,' in Robert Colls and Philip Dodd (eds.), Englishness: Politics and Culture 1880-1920, Croom Helm, 1986, pp.62-88.

36 See for example Snowden, Labour and the New World, chapter 5, 'The Land Problem.'

37 J. Ramsay MacDonald, Labour's Policy versus Protection: The Real Issues of the General Election, Labour Party, n.d. 1923, p.9. Original emphasis.

motor cars and drove out to re-discover England. This also fitted neatly in with the socialists' view of England. Hence Merrie England fairs continued to be held, though less often than before the war. To raise money for jailed Poplar councillors, 'Ye Old English Fayre' was held in September 1921. Another, in Lambeth at Christmas 1922 offered 'old English cottages, ... attendants ... dressed as Quakeresses, ... a town crier and a band of strolling minstrels'. MacDonald made another Merrie England fair the opportunity for affirming that socialism meant 'cycling' and 'singing'. 'The Socialist Movement,' he explained, 'must remain a purely mechanical and hard economic thing unless it was inspired by good music.'³⁸ Anti-landlordism maintained its attraction for the British left. Even the Communist Party could be drawn into the old radical language when it came to the land. A pamphlet by the infant party echoed exactly the language of Edward Carpenter in the 1880s: 'By force and craft a robber band has grabbed your native land. 'Tis up to you to do your bit to *grab it back again*. Join the Communist Party and help to bring about the day of working class emancipation.'³⁹

Another socialist attracted to this rural radicalism was the guild socialist and labour historian, G.D.H. Cole. Finding himself removed from political influence with the collapse of Guild Socialism in the early twenties, he turned his attention to writing a biography of William Cobbett.⁴⁰ This was no sterile historical project but a sympathetic journey. Hugh Gaitskell recalled how, walking through southern England with Cole (his tutor at Oxford), they would talk of past radicals:

His favourite was certainly Cobbett. He loved this brilliant, forthright pamphleteer with his hatred of sham and evasions, his colossal energy, his robust language and his passion for the English countryside. These were qualities which Douglas himself held in highest esteem. The special edition of Rural Rides upon which he was working [after completing the Cobbett biography] was a labour of love.⁴¹

As well as sharing Cobbett's love of southern England, Cole admired his criticism of industrialisation. Cole's biography of Cobbett, like Cobbett's political life, was a denunciation of the uprooting from the soil of the English 'peasant' by enclosure and

38 Jonathan Schneer, George Lansbury, Manchester UP, Manchester, 1990, p.64; New Leader, 13 Oct 1922; Daily Telegraph, 5 March 1923, in Maurice Cowling, The Impact of Labour 1920-1924, Cambridge UP, 1971, p.291.

39 Frank Tanner, The Land Grabbers: A Tale of Robbery, CPGB, n.d. 1920, p.15. The mass trespass on Kinder Scout in 1932, organised by the radical British Workers' Sports Federation, provides a concrete example of class war in the countryside.

40 L.P. Carpenter, G.D.H. Cole: An Intellectual Biography, Cambridge UP, Cambridge, 1973, p.43.

41 Hugh Gaitskell, 'At Oxford in the Twenties,' in Asa Briggs and John Savile (ed.), Essays in Labour History: In Memory of G.D.H. Cole 25 September 1889 - 14 January 1959, Macmillan, 1960, p.11. Cole's edition of Rural Rides was published in three volumes in 1930.

the industrial revolution. Cole saw Cobbett as 'the tribune of the transition' when 'the peasant, who had held an independent, though modest, position in the village community, lost his status and came to depend for the means of life solely on wage-labour eked out more and more by poor relief'.⁴² Gaitskell also commented on Cole's 'certain nostalgia for pre-industrial Britain'.⁴³

In 1925 MacDonald published a book called Wanderings and Excursions, which devoted much space to the British countryside. It may have been published in response to Baldwin's, largely successful, attempt to appropriate the countryside for the Conservative Party, but it drew together some of MacDonald's earlier writings.⁴⁴ In the introduction, MacDonald explained his reluctance to reprint articles that had been meant to 'fill a corner in ephemeral sheets', but stated that his friends had flattered him that, collected together, these articles might induce 'a few more feet ... to take to the open road and moor, and a few more thoughts [to be] turned to the rising and the setting sun'. 'If the publication of these papers does that,' he decided, 'it will do a good service.'⁴⁵ The writings show MacDonald's pride in his Scottishness, and how this could be fitted into an idea of a rural Britain. Thus he could draw on Scottish legend. Writing of the area around Callender, he mused how 'in the hills Rob [Roy] still wanders; in the mists the miserable remnants of his clansmen still gather ... [T]he romance that time has woven round them makes them desirable companions on a hill tramp.'⁴⁶ But he also wrote of walks in England, remembering 'our British predecessors'.⁴⁷ The central point for MacDonald was the rural nature of the country, north and south of the border. In the country, one could feel that Bolshevism and direct action were distant and harmless, with no place in rural Britain. On going into the Cairngorms he wrote, 'I started, and guided some youthful feet as well, to where the Golden Age still lingers, despite the worries of Bolshevism, Marxian rebels, and increasing prices.'⁴⁸ Of a walking trip in Yorkshire, he decided that socialism was a creed of open spaces:

Politics in the city is too much a thing of bars and spittoons. Here it is a national spirit. The proper platform of the I.L.P. is a glacial boulder. In the streets it is an affair of wages, hours, grub, housing; on the moors it is a thing of liberty and spirit. Every hill-top is a Pisgah for a democrat.⁴⁹

42 G.D.H. Cole, The Life of William Cobbett, W. Collins Sons, 1925, pp.12, 6.

43 Gaitskell, 'At Oxford in the Twenties,' p.12. See also Martin J. Wiener, 'The Changing Image of William Cobbett,' Journal of British Studies, vol. XIII, no. 2, 1974, pp.135-154.

44 See John Ramsden, The Age of Balfour and Baldwin 1902-1940, Longman, 1978, chapter 9.

45 J. Ramsay MacDonald, Wanderings and Excursions, Jonathan Cape, 1929, first published 1925, p.7.

46 Wanderings and Excursions, p.43.

47 Wanderings and Excursions, p.81.

48 Wanderings and Excursions, p.57, see also p.61.

49 Wanderings and Excursions, p.91. Pisgah was the mountain from which Moses looked on the Promised Land.

Rural nostalgia was a sentiment that much of the left shared. Agricultural reorganisation and the hope of winning rural seats was a poor substitute. The latter task was difficult outside Norfolk, where agricultural labourers were unionised.⁵⁰ Labour won only one agricultural seat in 1918, two in 1922, five in 1923, one in 1924 and five in 1929.⁵¹ Of the thirty areas in the English counties with no Divisional Labour Party in 1922, twenty-six were agricultural seats.⁵² Where little or no union organisation existed, it could be difficult to find candidates and election workers. The use of an advertisement banner for meetings, 'a tip particularly useful for rural constituencies ... when no local group of workers were available [*sic*]' to distribute leaflets, as suggested by C.W. Wilkinson of Portsmouth Labour Party in the Labour Organiser, was not the ideal solution.⁵³ There were other problems for prospective candidates. The ILP candidate at the Ludlow by-election in March 1923 candidly admitted he had not previously considered agricultural problems, and his 1,400 votes placed him at the bottom of the poll.⁵⁴ One estimate was that £600 annually was needed for non-election years for every rural seat and £1,000 for an election. Labour was unable to raise this money locally, and unable to afford it nationally.⁵⁵ Even where Labour fought by-elections in rural seats, the outcome was not always satisfactory. Labour Organiser noted that

The results of the Louth election emphasises that however much we may imagine the countryside to be politically awakening, the hopes and enthusiasm engendered by successful village green meetings dwindle away as the actualities of deficient organisation put them to the test.⁵⁶

Labour's desire to spread into rural areas, increasing the validity of their claims to be a national party and salving their anti-landlord consciences, remained largely unfulfilled in the twenties.

50 Labour won North Norfolk in 1922, 1923 and 1924, South Norfolk in 1920 and 1924. F.W.S. Craig (ed.), British Parliamentary Election Results 1918-1949, third edition, Parliamentary Research Services, Chichester, 1983, pp.431-435.

51 Michael Kinnear, The British Voter: An Atlas and Survey since 1885, Batsford, 1968, pp.120. Agricultural seat here means one with more than thirty per cent of its occupied male population over the age of twelve engaged in agriculture, of which there were eighty-six.

52 Kinnear, The British Voter, p.108. By 1924 however only North Dorset, Rye and Richmond still had no DLP. Hereford had a County Labour Party.

53 Labour Organiser, Jan 1921. Other suggestions were motor cycles or bicycles, see Labour Organiser, March and July 1921.

54 McKibbin, Evolution of the Labour Party, pp.152-153.

55 McKibbin, Evolution of the Labour Party, p.154.

56 Labour Organiser, Oct 1921. Labour came bottom of the poll with 19.5 per cent of the vote.

Labour and the Children of Moscow

If Labour wanted to show that it was a national party, in terms of geography and cross-class representation, it also wished to show that it was a national party in the sense that it accepted the established form of British politics. In the first instance this meant that Labour wanted to distance itself from the Russian experience. In almost any situation, Labour's opponents were prepared to attempt to link Labour and Bolshevism. For example, Municipal Reform candidates in the London County Council elections of 1919 used a placard declaring:

LONDON "LABOUR" CANDIDATES
SUPPORT
PUBLIC CONTROL AND WORKERS'
CONTROL OF INDUSTRY.
The Bolsheviks (Socialists) supported and carried
out the same policy in Russia. RESULT:
Anarchy and starvation; Industry destroyed;
Religion swept away; women nationalised, and
Enslaved by the Bolsheviks as public property.
Do you want "public control" and "workers' control"
and the vilest slavery for women here? ...⁵⁷

Winston Churchill, conducting his campaign on Labour's unfitness to govern, accused Labour of being 'in love with these Bolshevik autocrats'. Perhaps the most remarkable of these accusations came from Viscount Curzon in the debate on the Labour amendment to the Royal Address, which led to Baldwin's resignation in January 1924:

It is all very well for the Member for Miles Platting (Mr. Clynes) to make such a speech as we have listened to this afternoon, a mild and moderate speech I agree, but behind the forces of Labour such as we see represented on the benches in this House there are far more sinister forces ranged. There are in my constituency [South Battersea] on the register no fewer than 1,000 known members of the I.R.A. There are behind them again the forces of naked Communism. (Interruption.) I know the hon. Member is well known for his sympathy with the enemies of his country. He goes to Russia and Germany.⁵⁸

Labour knew that those such as Curzon could not be convinced of their benignity. They earnestly wished, however, to refute such accusations to calm the fears of the less hysterical. They saw the best method of achieving this as total dissociation from

⁵⁷ Labour Leader, 13 March 1919.

⁵⁸ The Times, 16 Feb 1920; HC Debates, 5:169, 373, 17 Jan 1924; see also David A. Jarvis, Stanley Baldwin and the Ideology of the Conservative Response to Socialism, 1918-31, unpublished Lancaster PhD, 1991, chapter 3; for the 1924 election anti-Labour campaign, which New Leader described as 'a carnival of barbaric unreason', see New Leader, 31 October 1924 and Chris Cook, The Age of Alignment: Electoral Politics in Britain 1922-1929, Macmillan, 1975, chapter 18.

the Communist Party of Great Britain. Not only was Communist affiliation rejected year after year at Labour conferences, but it was made clear as to why this was the case. Speakers against Communist affiliation alleged that the CPGB followed orders from Moscow. Emanuel Shinwell, Clyde rebel, explained to the 1921 conference how 'the essence of Communism (so far as he could understand it) was a rigid cast-iron discipline.'⁵⁹ This argument was developed by Frank Hodges, secretary of the Miners' Federation, whose visit to conference was not complete without an indignant attack upon Communism. Not only were Communists under orders from a foreign power, which was in itself against the best traditions of the British, but the orders came from minds totally alien to western Europe:

The British Communist Party - and he was sorry to confess it of his countrymen - were the intellectual slaves of Moscow, unthinking, unheeding, accepting decrees and decisions without criticism or comment, taking orders from the Asiatic mind.⁶⁰

In the wake of the Campbell case, which led to the fall of the first Labour government, such views could become openly xenophobic, and even anti-semitic.⁶¹ Jack Jones, MP for Silvertown, at the 1924 conference which spanned the fall of the Labour government, rejected completely the idea that 'a certain number of gentlemen in Moscow with unpronounceable names, and of very doubtful nationality ... should have the right to dictate British policy, and say that MacDonald was a traitor'.⁶²

Also explicit in such arguments was the superiority of western socialism and the connection between Labour and British national history. Hodges made this quite clear in 1923, even if some distortion was necessary:

Russia had nothing to teach the political democracy of the Western world. British institutions had grown up in accordance very largely with Britain's own peculiar history, and if anyone could show him where Russia could give to Western civilisation ideas better than those that had been adopted by them, he would be delighted for that man to come and state his case, because that would be an intellectual argument.... Of all the Labour Movements of the world the British was the best; so much was that the case that their comrades in other countries looked upon the British Labour Movement, first as the most disciplined, second as the nearest to power, and thirdly as the most capable of maintaining power when it got it. He wanted them to be worthy of the British Labour Movement, and they could only be worthy as they stood true to their political institutions.⁶³

59 Labour Party, Conference Report, 1921, p.161.

60 Labour Party, Conference Report, 1922, p.198.

61 The Conservatives wishing to draw attention to Labour's sympathy for Russia wanted the government to fall on the Russian treaties, MacDonald saw that an election on the Campbell case would confuse issues and chose to make it a matter of confidence, see Keith Middlemas and John Barnes, Baldwin: A Biography, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969, p.273.

62 Labour Party, Conference Report, 1924, p.128.

63 Labour Party, Conference Report, 1923, pp.187-188.

Gradually, Labour made it more and more difficult for Communists to play a role in the party. By 1924 no Communist could stand as a Labour candidate in local or national elections, and in theory no member of the Communist Party could be a member of the Labour Party. Palme Dutt, Communist editor of the Labour Monthly, saw such moves as part of the

great transformation which was begun in 1918, when the Labour party was taken up to cease to be the organ of a class and become the organ of the 'community'. By the disciplinary exclusions, by the tacit renunciation of the class struggle, by the proclamation of devotion to king and country, by the shouldering of the imperial burden, the Labour Party is to become part and parcel of the great machinery of the capitalist State. As if to symbolise the completion of the transformation, Sidney Webb, his handiwork completed, comes out into the open as not merely the head, but the figure head of the Party.⁶⁴

Sidney Webb and British Socialism

The Fabian Society had long advocated a distinctive British socialism. That Labour from 1918 seemed to adopt Fabian ideas has been interpreted as the victory of Webb and the Fabian Society over Labour. Historical opinion has echoed Palme Dutt. A.M. McBriar concluded that, after 1918, 'the Labour Party had accepted Fabianism as its doctrinal basis,' and Norman and Jeanne MacKenzie decided that, with Labour and the New Social Order, 'the essential ideas of Fabianism had at last become official Labour policy.'⁶⁵ Such an interpretation suggests that Labour had different ideas about socialism from the Fabians, that the Fabian Society had long wished to shape the Labour Party in its own image, and that events external to the Labour Party played no part in the formulation of its strategy. This argument is clearly untenable. The ILP, much more influential than the Fabian Society, had also constructed a view of British socialism. The Fabian Society had alienated most of the left over its response to the Boer War, Taff Vale, and even over the central issue of labour representation. It was, indeed, the failure of Fabian permeation and subsequently of their independent campaign for the reform of the Poor Law, that made the Webbs view the Labour Party as crucial for the advancement of socialism. It was only the First World War that ensured Webb a role near the centre of the Labour Party. His patriotism meant agreement with the majority of the Labour leadership on the central issue of the day, and his work on the War Emergency

64 Labour Monthly, Aug 1922, p.71.

65 A.M. McBriar, Fabian Socialism and English Politics 1884-1918, Cambridge UP, 1962, p.345; Norman and Jeanne MacKenzie, The First Fabians, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977, p.398.

Workers' National Committee brought him into daily cooperation with that leadership. Hence, J.M. Winter, who rightly sees the term 'Fabianism' as an inappropriate blanket description of Labour's socialism, better explains the position of Webb: 'Webbian socialism, with its emphasis on institutional, administrative action, emerged from the war as a far more potent force in large part because of the war itself and the nature of the demands it made on the Labour movement.'⁶⁶ It was the war, not Webb, that made Labour leaders so aware of the state, and its potential role in their plans for social change. Webb joined the Labour national executive in 1915. He drafted the new constitution and Labour and the New Social Order, he became president of the Labour Party in 1922, but Henderson and MacDonald were certainly more important than Webb. He was there on terms set by the Labour Party.

Presiding over the 1923 Labour conference, Webb's speech was what the Labour leadership wanted to hear: 'First, let me insist on what our opponents habitually ignore, and indeed, what they seem intellectually incapable of understanding, namely the inevitable gradualness of our scheme of change.' He continued that Labour could expect to form a government, and that it must be aware of that probability:

We have, from now onward, to work and speak and act, under a sense of the liability, at any moment, to be charged with putting our plans and projects in operation.... We should not lightly commit ourselves as a party - and we should not even seek to commit the party as a party - to new or additional projects, or to the details of reforms, if these belong more appropriately to a stage of greater freedom and less responsibility.

He then spoke of 'our practical British way', and privileged this extreme carefulness with the claim that it formed a distinct set of ideas, which could be called British Socialism: 'We must always remember that the founder of British Socialism was not Karl Marx but Robert Owen, and that Robert Owen preached not "class war" but the ancient doctrine of human fellowship - a faith and a hope reaffirmed in the words of that other great British Socialist - William Morris.'⁶⁷ 'This was the same conference at which Hodges had called the British labour movement the best, and it was also in

66 J.M. Winter, Socialism and the Challenge of War, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London and Boston, 1974, pp.277, 6.

67 Labour Party, Conference Report, pp.178, 179, 180. It is not quite unnecessary to draw attention to Morris's News from Nowhere, chapter 17, 'How the Change Came': "'Tell me one thing, if you can," said I. "Did the change, the 'revolution' it used to be called, come peacefully?" "Peacefully?" said he; "what peace was there amongst those poor confused wretches of the nineteenth century? It was war from beginning to end: bitter war, till hope and pleasure put an end to it." "Do you mean actual fighting with weapons?" said I, "or the strikes and lock-outs and starvation of which we have heard?" "Both, both," he said.'

the same year that the ILP conference, too, had been marked by such national self-congratulatory comments. Clifford Allen, new chairman of the ILP, in his address, told delegates that

If you look back over history you will see how much our country has contributed to political ideas. I would wish that it might again so contribute - this time by being the first nation to show men how Socialism can become recognised and adopted as the surest method of preventing the suffering of the world - and by the real consent of the people. I am patriot enough to hope that this may be the work of the British Socialist Movement.⁶⁸

Webb may have been influenced by the tone of this speech, and he may also have felt that British Socialism needed clarifying after the House of Commons debate initiated by Philip Snowden. Snowden noted in his autobiography that 'socialism' did not figure on the party executive's list from which MPs might choose should they should they win the private members' ballot.⁶⁹ MacDonald was not pleased at the prospect of drawing attention to Labour's socialism.⁷⁰ Snowden ensured that members opposite were aware of the moderation of his motion:

We propose no revolution, and we do not propose, and I certainly will resist any proposal of confiscation. It is the longest way of obtaining your object, and the certain way to disaster. There is no analogy between Socialism and Bolshevism. Socialism and Bolshevism are antitheses. I hope that hon. Members will forgive me when I tell them that Bolshevism, both in its political theories and its practice, and in its ideal of dictatorship and confiscation, is not Socialism, but die-hard 'Toryism'.⁷¹

When the motion was debated again, because Bonar Law allowed it a further day, Clynes came forward to claim socialism as the work of the patriot. 'Who is the good patriot?' he asked, 'Surely he who wants property not for himself but for his country.' And Henderson drew attention to 'the conservative character of the British people', which, he said, Labour 'do not ignore'.⁷² Labour were seeking to replace the Liberals as the main anti-Conservative party, and their socialism aimed to distinguish them from the Liberals. But at the same time they wanted it known, and widely known, that this socialism was British.

Socialism of the Privy Council

In the Snowden debate, the Communist MP J.T. Walton Newbold called Labour's

68 ILP, Conference Report, 1923, p.149.

69 Philip Snowden, An Autobiography Volume Two 1919-1934, Ivor Nicholson and Watson, 1934, p.581.

70 Colin Cross, Philip Snowden, Barrie and Rockliff, 1966, p.186.

71 HC Debates, 5:161, 2482, 20 March 1923.

72 HC Debates, 5:166, 1914, 1965, 16 July 1923.

socialism 'the Socialism of the Privy Council'.⁷³ Supporters of Communist affiliation to Labour had contrasted Labour leaders' willingness to swear the oath of allegiance as Privy Councillors with their unwillingness to admit entry to Communists who gave their allegiance to the world's only workers' state.⁷⁴ They defined this contrast as loyalty to the British state rather than solidarity with the international working class. Yet Labour leaders were unapologetic. Henderson said that it was an honour to be a Privy Councillor, the only honour that Labour members should accept.⁷⁵ In the years after the First World War, Labour leaders sought to show both Labour's moderation and its attachment to the institutions of the British state. Membership of the Privy Council was one such method of doing so.

In the immediate post-war years, the major threat to this image of Labour had come from direct action and industrial unrest. Clynes had called these 'needless stoppages and strikes' a 'reckless use' of labour's power, and warned that Labour 'would not win the approval of the nation merely by giving shocks to the nation'.⁷⁶ J.H. Thomas denied that the actions of a minority were representative of Labour:

Despite all these wild and alarming statements, the fact remains that Labour forms the second largest party in the State; its history proves that it is not the inexperienced stripling some people would have us believe, and demonstrates that it possesses as great a sense of responsibility as any body of men which has ever claimed the right and ability to administer the affairs of the nation.⁷⁷

When the wave of strikes was brought to an end by increasing unemployment and Black Friday, Labour leaders' claims of moderation, responsibility and respectability became easier to make and defend. In 1923 Snowden wrote a series of articles for the Conservative Morning Post called 'If Labour Rules,' in which he argued that 'the majority of the electors of this country will never vote for the Labour Party unless they are assured that a Labour government will be controlled by common sense and moderation.'⁷⁸

This is what Labour leaders set out to achieve. Here three themes will be examined, all intimately linked to the conception of British nationhood: monarchy, parliament and empire. When Thomas said Labour wished no harm to the 'old

73 HC Debates, 5:166, 1982, 16 July 1923.

74 For example, Robert Williams, Transport Workers, Labour Party, Conference Report, 1921, p.164.

75 Labour Party, Conference Report, 1922, p.213. The resolution under discussion declared that 'no useful service can be served by any member of the Labour Party becoming a Privy Councillor'. It was defeated by 3,694,000 to 386,000 votes.

76 The Times, 8 Aug 1919.

77 Thomas, When Labour Rules, p.33.

78 Cross, Philip Snowden, p.175.

country', he meant not a radical idea of the nation, but the traditional idea.

In 1922, as leader of the Labour Party, Clynes was invited to the wedding of the King George V's only daughter, Princess Mary. His acceptance was greeted by some criticism from within the labour movement. Clynes's explanation for his acceptance was that

I considered the invitation an honour, not to me so much as to the Party I led in Parliament.... In 1922 I felt that the vast majority of Labour voters throughout Great Britain would like to be represented at the wedding to which they obviously offered their good wishes.⁷⁹

This explanation helped Clynes to maintain the idea of himself as representative of ordinary people, but it also showed his acceptance of monarchy as symbol of the nation. Later, Clynes, with Thomas and Snowden, was invited by Lady Astor to a dinner party at which the King and Queen would be present. It was expected that guests would wear knee-breeches. Thomas already owned a pair, Snowden was excused because of his lameness. Clynes showed his deference by wearing a pair lent by Lord Astor upon which many safety pins had to be used to hold them up.⁸⁰ Again, criticism came from within the movement. But Thomas had an answer. 'I would like to know when, or in what way,' he demanded, 'we as a party ever declared ourselves for a republican constitution.'⁸¹ A Labour conference had never declared in favour of a republic, but neither had it declared for a monarchy. But Labour leaders, in these years, framed an attitude to monarchy that not only accepted it, but actively endorsed it. MacDonald, in 1919, had written that

the Labour Party has to save itself from chastisement; it cannot allow handbills to be issued against its candidates, headed: "The Labour Party condones an insult to our Gracious Sovereign".... With its eye upon a Parliamentary majority won by retaining the confidence of all sorts and conditions of opinion, it must avoid scares amongst the flock, and it must keep their minds placid and trustful as regards itself.⁸²

It is, however, important to understand that Labour's attitude to the monarchy was not simply about winning or losing votes at elections. In When Labour Rules, Thomas had adopted a position that seemed to be abstentionism, however benevolent. 'Our King,' he wrote, 'has proved himself during many political crises, to be an essentially constitutional monarch, and I have no hesitation in saying that while such an attitude is adopted by the King, the question of Republic versus

79 J.R. Clynes, Memoirs 1869-1924, Hutchinson, 1937, p.326.

80 Snowden, Autobiography Volume Two, p.661.

81 Gregory Blaxland, J.H. Thomas: A Life for Unity, Frederick Muller, 1964, p.164.

82 Socialist Review, Oct-Dec 1919, p.308.

Monarchy will not arise.'⁸³ Linda Colley has shown that these limits on the monarch were the accepted outcome of the Protestant Glorious Revolution, accepted by all British monarchists.⁸⁴ Thomas's qualification, therefore, included no desire to see the end of the monarchy. Indeed, once Labour was invited to the Palace to kiss hands, once the King had proved himself to be acting constitutionally, Thomas praised the monarchy for their 'recognition that patriotism, love of Empire, service and duty were not the gift or monopoly of a class or creed'.⁸⁵ The Webbs advanced from this admiration for monarchy, seeing it as an important element in their socialist constitution, though they too stressed that the monarch must not be involved in politics:

The national organisation herein proposed does not involve the abolition of the ancient institution of an hereditary Monarch. The common decision that it is both necessary and desirable that the titular head of State should not be charged with any part of the actual government or administration of the community may certainly be accepted in the Socialist Commonwealth. Especially for the British Commonwealth of Nations, of which we assume the continuance in a democratic form, is such a titular or ceremonial headship almost indispensable.⁸⁶

Moderate Labour accepted the idea of the British Empire,⁸⁷ and argued from this that a monarch was necessary. For Labour, yearning to be a national party, acceptance of national institutions became inevitable. There were critics of Labour's monarchism. But they were fairly easily deflected. George Lansbury was excluded from the first Labour Cabinet for saying publicly that the King ought to remember Cromwell and Charles I rather than hesitate to call on Labour to form a government.⁸⁸ Yet it was Lansbury, earlier in 1923, whom the Labour national executive had chosen to deflect a resolution at conference asking for a statement on the attitude of Labour to the monarchy. Lansbury told the delegates that capitalism, not the monarchy, was the source of poverty, and that they should not 'fool about with a question which was of no vital importance.'⁸⁹ 'This was the more surprising,'

83 Thomas, When Labour Rules, pp.45-46. Thomas's attitude to the monarchy is better expressed in his autobiography; see the chapter entitled 'Some Cherished Memories of the Royal House,' My Story, Hutchison, 1937.

84 Linda Colley, Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837, Yale UP, New Haven and London, 1992, pp.46-47.

85 Blaxland, J.H. Thomas, p.170.

86 Sidney and Beatrice Webb, A Constitution for the Socialist Commonwealth of Great Britain, London School of Economics and Political Science/Cambridge UP, Cambridge, 1975, p.108.

87 See below p.224.

88 Raymond Postgate, The Life of George Lansbury, Longmans Green, 1951, pp.224-225; Sidney Webb, 'The First Labour Government,' Political Quarterly, vol. 32, no. 1, Jan-March 1961, p.13.

89 Labour Party, Conference Report, 1923, p.251.

exclaimed the Workers' Weekly, 'because Lansbury in his speech declared that he was a Republican.'⁹⁰ To republicans within their own ranks, Labour monarchists called the issue irrelevant; to monarchists outside their ranks, Labour monarchists called the monarch's survival 'a question of the highest importance not only to Great Britain, but to the whole Empire'.⁹¹ And it was this latter view that dominated in the Labour Party. When Stephen Walsh, Secretary of State for War in Labour's first government, chaired his first meeting of the Army Council, he felt confident enough to appeal to the generals' patriotism. 'Gentlemen,' he began, always remember that we must all be loyal to the King.'⁹²

One reason Labour gave for the need for an apolitical monarch was that he provided the British Empire with the only possible head of state. This was important, since the majority of prominent Labour policy makers wanted to see the continued existence of the Empire. Labour's policy towards empire is summarised by a sentence from Labour and the New Social Order: 'The Labour Party stands for its maintenance and progressive development on the lines of Local Autonomy and "Home Rule All Round".'⁹³ Labour stood, therefore, for reform of the Empire, and was critical of imperialist abuses such ^{as} repression in Ireland and the massacre at Amritsar, but this criticism implied no wish to bring about the end of empire.⁹⁴ Labour chose to call the empire less distasteful names, for example, 'a Britannic Alliance', or 'the British Commonwealth of Free Nations', and this helped to reinforce their belief that the empire was good both for Britain and the rest of the world.⁹⁵ Expressing the former, Clynes, speaking on 'Labour and the Commonwealth' in 1919, said that 'The War ... had taught the nation the unmistakable lesson that it had to rely more than ever upon the resources of the Empire if it was to maintain its place of authority among the nations of the world.' On the latter, Thomas explained that 'Labour's aim will be to civilise, not to exploit.'⁹⁶

Labour leaders, therefore, shared the dominant view of the British as the most fit to hold an empire. Lord Olivier, commenting on C.R. Das's presidential address to a

90 Workers' Weekly, 7 July 1923.

91 Thomas, When Labour Rules, p.45.

92 Hugh Dalton, Call Back Yesterday: Memoirs 1887-1931, Frederick Muller, 1953, p.147.

93 Kellog and Gleason, British Labor and the War, p.392.

94 For Amritsar, see Ben Spoor, HC Debates, 5:131, 1739-1742, 8 July 1920.

95 Kellog and Gleason, British Labor and the War, p.392; Craig (ed.), General Election Manifestos 1918-1966, p.5 (1918 manifesto). This was noticed by the Communist Party, see CPGB, The Labour Movement at the Crossroads: An Open Letter to the Labour Party Conference, n.d., 1924, p.5.

96 The Times, 8 Aug 1918; Thomas, When Labour Rules, p.135.

Bengal Swarajist conference, in which Britain was described as militarist, wrote

The very fact of this account of the spirit of English liberty and discipline and liberty is obviously partial and inappropriate, ignoring as it does altogether the genius of our common law, which is our people's own native expression, and not a bureaucratic or military formulation.⁹⁷

Thomas was even more blunt. 'A proud boast of the British is that they have no equals as colonisers,' he wrote in his autobiography. 'I think it is true.'⁹⁸ MacDonald chose these two to be, respectively, Labour's first Secretary of State for India and Secretary of State for the Colonies. 'These beliefs in Britain's essential fitness to govern the empire led directly to simple statements in support of the Empire. Thus, at a British Empire Exhibition luncheon for trade union leaders, Thomas declared, 'We love our Empire. We are proud of the greatness of our Empire,' and Clynes explained that 'We on the Labour side want as fervently as any class to see the British Empire well developed.'⁹⁹ There was a limit to Labour's 'anti-imperialism' and even to its plans for imperial reform. First, all that Labour was prepared to concede was 'freedom *in* the Empire'.¹⁰⁰ Second, if Britain was to bring its native liberty to the Empire it was at a pace to be set by the Imperial Parliament. Thomas claimed that 'Labour says it is not right that these human beings should have their lives directed by strings pulled in Whitehall,' and 'India ought to become a self-governing dominion within a British Commonwealth, and under Labour it would be given every opportunity of development to this end.' But he continued, 'I know it could not happen quickly. I am not suggesting that, if a Labour Government be elected to-morrow, the government of India would cease the next day. One has to educate.'¹⁰¹ Likewise, Olivier proclaimed in the House of Lords that 'The programme of Constitutional Democracy ... was not native to India.... It was impossible for the Indian people or Indian politicians to leap at once into the saddle and administer an ideal constitution.' The similarity of such statements to those of traditional imperialists was pointed out by the Indian Communist, M.N. Roy, who said:

97 Margaret Olivier (ed.), Sydney Olivier: Letters and Selected Writings, George Allen and Unwin, 1948, pp.152-153. For Olivier's political and colonial career see Francis Lee, Fabianism and Colonialism: The Life and Political Thought of Lord Sydney Olivier, Defiant, 1988.

98 Thomas, My Story, p.81.

99 Workers' Weekly, 19 Oct 1923.

100 The title of the section on Empire in Labour's 1922 manifesto, Craig (ed.), General Election Manifestos 1918-1966, p.12. Emphasis added.

101 Thomas, When Labour Rules, pp.126, 138.

The Indian people did not require the advent of a Labour Government to hear all those stock arguments of Imperialism, which the Conservatives and Liberals have dinned into their ears from time immemorial. Such a speech could have been expected from a Curzon - but it fell instead from the lips of a Fabian Socialist, a Labour Lord ...¹⁰²

Labour's attitudes to Ireland show, however, that the party was not united over attitudes to empire, but that the leadership was prepared to ignore conference if it interfered with attempts to establish Labour as a party fit to govern. As Ireland moved towards rebellion, the Labour Party was forced to take the issue seriously after many years of neglect. At the June 1918 conference, Ireland was debated in detail for the first time. A resolution was passed with the support of the leadership declaring 'that the conference unhesitatingly recognises the claim of the people of Ireland to Home Rule and to self-determination in all exclusively Irish affairs.' An amendment to remove the last phrase was defeated.¹⁰³ But, as the war for independence escalated, the contradiction between the right to self-determination and any qualification to it became apparent. The view of the leadership was expressed by Thomas:

Ireland is a nation, and the Irish should decide their own destiny.... If they had to wait until Labour comes into power, they will have to wait only that long before they get their freedom. I do not think a republic would be right. I believe that it is not a necessary part of the granting of freedom to that country.¹⁰⁴

The party as a whole, however, rejected the latter part of this at the 1920 conference, when an executive amendment reinstating the 'exclusively Irish affairs' clause was defeated by 1,191,000 to 945,000 votes. Yet despite this, within a month Thomas, in the House of Commons, demanded only dominion status for Ireland, and within five months the PLP declared its position to be self-determination 'provided it afforded protection to the minority and would prevent Ireland becoming a military or naval menace to Great Britain.' At the December 1920 special conference on Ireland, this formula was maintained and no amendments were allowed. The leadership attempted to justify this contradiction. Adamson explained that while 'the great bulk of the Irish people in the south and west are, undoubtedly, demanding complete independence ... I do not believe in their heart of hearts they really want a republic; they are simply putting forward, in my opinion, their maximum demand.' The Labour leadership therefore limited their support of self-determination to that which

102 Communist Party, The Record of the Labour Government, n.d. 1924, pp.12-13.

103 Geoffrey Bell, Troublesome Business: The Labour Party and the Irish Question, Pluto, 1982, pp.38-39.

104 Thomas, When Labour Rules, p.143.

did not conflict with the British national interest. Hence, when the treaty allowed the Royal Navy access to five Irish ports and forced the southern parliament to swear an oath of allegiance to the monarch, Clynes welcomed it as 'a triumph of national patriotism, a victory for enduring national spirit over every obstacle and every form of force'.¹⁰⁵ This could have applied equally to either Irish or British patriotism. Hence while Labour was prepared to mount an impressive campaign of five-hundred meetings against the government's Irish policy, it continued to support Home Rule, rather than accept the decisions of the Irish. A.V. Dicey in 1886 had explained that 'A Home Ruler asks not for the political separation, but for the political partnership of England and Ireland. He wishes not that the firm should be dissolved but that the Articles of Association should be revised.'¹⁰⁶ In such a context, Thomas's alleged declaration upon meeting his civil servants at the Colonial Office that 'I've been sent here to see that there's no mucking about with the British Empire,'¹⁰⁷ becomes less surprising.

Clynes, in a speech to the annual meeting of the Empire Parliamentary Association in 1921, said that the resources of the Empire, which he believed were moral as well as economic 'could only effectively find expression through Parliamentary institutions,' and that if 'the struggle for Parliamentary institutions had been a long one .. it was [also] a successful one'.¹⁰⁸ Here Clynes was drawing out the third element of the British national trinity. It was, for Labour, the most important one, for whereas monarchism and imperialism were difficult to defend from a socialist point of view, they had few such problems with parliamentary democracy after the defeat of the direct actionists. One argument that parliamentary socialists had used against direct actionists was that if Labour acted unconstitutionally when in opposition, they would have provided the opposition to a future Labour government with the justification for unconstitutional action. Clynes explained to the Commons in early 1919 that

I stand not only for respect for the law because we make it, but because some^{day} those of us who have now to play the part of critic and sometimes of opponent of the Government may for aught we know be called upon by the country to be responsible for the making and administration of the law. We, or those who are to follow us, who may have that responsibility should be careful of the examples which in these days of less responsibility and greater freedom we may now set.¹⁰⁹

105 Bell, *Troublesome Business*, pp. 57, 63, 62, 67.

106 D.G. Boyce, *Englishmen and Irish Troubles British Public Opinion and the Making of Irish Policy 1918-22*, Jonathan Cape, 1972, pp.63, 40.

107 Blaxland, *J.H. Thomas*, p.170.

108 *The Times*, 3 Nov 1921.

109 *HC Debates*, 5:112, 168-169, 12 Feb 1919.

This was not an ephemeral argument. Labour leaders, however moderate, could not be entirely sure that even if they won an election, they would be allowed office. Those on the left could threaten drastic measures, such as Lansbury's reminder to the King of the fate of Charles II. Moderates were more temperamentally inclined to hope their moderation would not provoke any unconstitutional action from their opponents, and were also keen not to provide these opponents with the moral right to do so, on the grounds that Labour, while in opposition, had themselves acted unconstitutionally.

Labour continued to stress that its aim of social change was peaceful. Thus C.R. Buxton, standing for Accrington in 1922, stated in his election address that

The Labour Party believes in changing this system, by gradual and constitutional means, into a Co-operative Commonwealth under which the worker shall enjoy the fruits of his work, and have some voice in the carrying on of industry. That is what Socialism means and this is the Socialism I stand for. It is not 'revolution' but sober common sense.¹¹⁰

But Labour's constitutionalism did not stop there. Many, if not most, Labour MPs also held a deep affection for the peculiar British constitution, its conventions and procedures. They enjoyed 'taking part in the game', as James Sexton called it.¹¹¹ This covered the spectrum of the party. It is no surprise that Thomas should write that 'Correct procedure ... is absolutely essential in the conduct of British politics: there must be no deviation from precedent in Constitutional matters.'¹¹² Still less that MacDonald in 1922 should explain that the Commons's 'ceremonial part is its inheritance from a rich history of conflict to establish liberty,' and hence that 'These ceremonies are picturesque, none of them are really a hindrance to work, and I think it would be a pity if any went.'¹¹³ But even left-wing figures found themselves admiring the British Parliament and its ways. George Lansbury had in 1912 made a name for himself for shaking his fist in Asquith's face at the Treasury bench over the plight of suffragettes in prison. After the war, he took children around the House of Commons. He would tell them 'the thing they most obstinately refuse to believe, which is that this "venerable pile" is not venerable at all. It is very recent,' but he left these children

with great reluctance, and with a strong feeling that all we members of Parliament should take every opportunity of showing our children all there is to see in the stone and bricks and mortar of Parliament, but above everything else make them under-

110 New Leader, 10 Nov 1922.

111 HC Debates, 5:112, 361, 13 Feb 1919.

112 Thomas, My Story, p. 74.

113 New Leader, 29 Dec 1922.

stand that Parliament is their birthright, their safeguard against tyranny, and should be cared for and preserved for further service on behalf of people in the days to come.¹¹⁴

Also on the left of the PLP were the Clydesiders, authors of the most famous scene of the inter-war years, in which Maxton and other Clyde MPs were suspended for calling the Conservative government murderers.¹¹⁵ At the general election of 1922, a phalanx of Scottish Labour MPs, ten from Glasgow's fifteen constituencies, were returned. David Kirkwood announced their intention to do well for their nation, and the method by which they would achieve it. He warned that the MPs from the Clyde had arrived to 'smash' the House's 'atmosphere of indifference':

There will be no tranquillity as long as there are children in Scotland starving.... No child ought to starve. It should be utterly impossible in this land of the brave and free. Do you think that we, who come from Scotland ... from that hardy and intelligent race whom the Romans could never defeat, are going to allow those nincompoops who sit on those benches to efface us?¹¹⁶

Kirkwood was not present during the 'murderers' episode, but The Times parliamentary correspondent remarked 'how the member for Dumbarton Burghs must regret his absence'.¹¹⁷ Yet Kirkwood became an admirer of Parliament and its procedure; he noted that 'the "conventions" of the Commons are strong to bind. At first I thought they were nothing more than surface politeness. They are not. They are the foundation of the Parliamentary system.'¹¹⁸ Middlemas has remarked that 'a disrespect for parliamentary methods [was] wholly alien to Maxton and the old Clydesiders'.¹¹⁹ Even those of the Labour left who did not so wholeheartedly embrace parliamentary procedure still accepted the legitimacy of parliament.

The majority of the British left looked at the old country and liked what they saw. The monarchy, empire and parliament were historical components of Britain and Britishness which were overwhelmingly accepted. Indeed, MacDonald liked to draw attention to the oldness of such institutions, and the great value of the 'unity of historical nationality', for

114 George Lansbury, Looking Backwards - and Forwards, Blackie and Son, London and Glasgow, 1935, p.137, pp.148-149. For Lansbury's parliamentary scene see Postgate, Life of George Lansbury, pp.124-126.

115 See R.K. Middlemas, The Clydesiders: A Left Wing Struggle for Parliamentary Power, Hutchison, 1965, pp.127-130. That parliamentary scenes become famous shows how few there are, or in other words how often Labour MPs have not made them.

116 Mowat, Britain between the Wars, p.154.

117 The Times, 28 June 1923.

118 David Kirkwood, My Life of Revolt, George G. Harrap, 1935, p.203.

119 Middlemas, The Clydesiders, p.246.

To associate the living generations with those whose actions still throw a glamour over history, and to make the association one not merely of accident but of spirit, is of inestimable advantage in the education of a democracy. A people cut off from its own past is like a child brought up in a cold public institution. There is something in birth, but birth is the inheritance not of a few families but of whole peoples.... This, used not to mark off into separate sanctuaries from another after the manner of jingoistic nationalism, but to enrich the culture and enliven the spirits of the co-operating nations after the manner of Socialist Internationalism, is a necessary part of democratic education and should be taken into account in constructing an efficient system of democratic government.¹²⁰

While this passage displays all of MacDonald's usual complication of expression, it essentially means that before internationalism comes national identity, and that, therefore, not only is patriotism good for democracy, it is good for socialism.

The English Game - Labour after the 1923 General Election

In the autumn of 1923, Baldwin, looking for a way to reunite the Conservative Party, adopted the idea of Protection, and called a general election for 6 December.¹²¹ The Conservatives fought a dull campaign attempting to link Protection, Empire and patriotism.¹²² They also attempted to brand Labour as linked to foreign organisations, particularly through the 'Socialistische [*sic*] Arbeiter International'.¹²³ However, it would seem that less was made of this than in previous or subsequent elections. Whereas nearly a quarter of Conservative election addresses used the theme in both 1922 and 1924, only five per cent did so in 1923.¹²⁴ This was probably because Conservative candidates spent more time on the defensive about Protection.

Protection presented Labour with a problem, for it could potentially lead to a revival of the re-united Liberal Party. On 13 November, Asquith and Lloyd George had agreed to fight a united campaign. All Liberals would stand as 'Liberals' without any additional label. In a Free Trade versus Protection contest the Liberals were fighting on their 'home ground'.¹²⁵ Labour therefore had to attempt to be distinctive while also appearing moderate. MacDonald declared that 'The fight we are in now is not Protection versus Free Trade; the fight we are in now is Protection versus the

120 J. Ramsay MacDonald, Socialism: Critical and Constructive, revised edition, Cassell, 1924, p.239.

121 See Middlemas and Barnes, Baldwin, chapter 10.

122 Richard W. Lyman, The First Labour Government 1924, Russell and Russell, New York, 1957, chapter 2.

123 See the National Union leaflet reproduced in full in Robert McKenzie and Allan Silver, Angels in Marble - Working Class Conservatives in Urban England, Heinemann, 1968, pp.64-65.

124 Jarvis, Baldwin and the Conservative Response to Socialism, p.119.

125 Chris Cook, A Short History of the Liberal Party 1900-1976, Macmillan, London and Basingstoke, 1976, pp.91-94.

Labour Programme.¹²⁶ But the Labour manifesto offered a very moderate programme. While it described a 'Labour Programme of National Work', including 'a National System of Electrical Power Supply' and 'the development of Transport by road, rail and canal', it did not include nationalisation. Indeed it asked the voters to raise the election above party factionousness, 'to refuse to make this General Election a wretched partisan squabble about mean and huckstering policies'.¹²⁷ Again Labour stressed its special attachment to the constitution. MacDonald, at Neath, asked

What political party had ever fought a more finely constitutional battle than the Labour Party had ever done?... What party had ever done a greater service to the constitutional mind and the constitutional habit than the Labour Party, bringing all those people together and instilling in their hearts a firm belief in Parliamentary government and legislation?¹²⁸

Only the capital levy provided Labour with a distinctive programme; it was described by the manifesto as 'a non-recurring, graduated War Debt Redemption Levy', for reducing the National Debt only, which would offer 'relief for the taxpayer'.¹²⁹

While some in the Labour Party forecast fairly accurately the number of seats Labour would win, they did not forecast the significance of these wins.¹³⁰ Labour won 191 seats, up from 144 at dissolution. What made the election so significant was that the Liberals won forty-two extra seats, and thanks to Labour and Liberal gains, the Conservatives were reduced to 259 seats. While still the largest party, the Conservatives could claim no victory for Protection.

MacDonald claimed this advance as a victory for moderation, explaining that

The Labour Party had entered into the affections of the better sections of labour, and had gained the trust of many of the middle and professional classes.... It had acquired a character which rendered it scatheless against all forms of attack which implied meanness, dishonour or dishonesty - like 'Labour is after your savings,' or 'Labour is in the pockets of foreigners,' and such like.¹³¹

Nevertheless, there was an outburst of hysteria, as the peculiar constitutional situation presented the possibility of the first Labour government. Churchill forecast

126 Lyman, *First Labour Government*, p.53.

127 Craig (ed.), *General Election Manifestos 1918-1966*, pp.21-23. See also Margaret Bondfield's election address in Northampton, in her autobiography, *A Life's Work*, Hutchison, n.d., 1948, p.251.

128 *The Times*, 3 Dec 1923.

129 Craig (ed.), *General Election Manifestos 1918-1966*, pp.23, 22. See Dalton, *Call Back Yesterday*, p.143, for MacDonald's misgivings about the capital levy.

130 See for example, Margaret I. Cole (ed.), *Beatrice Webb's Diaries 1912-1924*, Longmans Green, 1952, pp.250, 253, 19 Nov, 3 Dec 1923.

131 *Socialist Review*, Jan 1924, p.2.

'a serious national misfortune such as has usually befallen great States only on the morrow of defeat in war'.¹³² The Saturday Review attacked Labour on a number of fronts. Labour had 'left the Communists in organized gangs to intimidate men and maul women'; it was not a party of labour at all, 'but one of international Socialists in all their ramifications'; and 'it is in essence town-bred, and its experiments in land-expropriation for its favourites could never breed yeomen.' It concluded that MacDonald believed in his cause, 'but we ... deny that he believes in patriotism'.¹³³ The English Review saw 'the sun of England ... menaced with final eclipse'. The National Review regretted 'the unspeakable humiliation of an anti-national government'.¹³⁴

If some were hysterical, the leaders of the Conservative and Liberal Parties were more realistic. Both Baldwin and Asquith realised that to keep Labour out of power through a coalition would weaken both parties and leave Labour much strengthened. Baldwin believed that, constitutionally, His Majesty's Opposition had a right to govern and he took the view that Labour would benefit from office, becoming more responsible, but he wanted the responsibility for putting Labour in to rest with the Liberals.¹³⁵ Asquith also rejected the idea of coalition. He wished to assert the independence of the Liberals, and believed that a Liberal government might follow a discredited Labour administration.¹³⁶ Asquith pointed out to the Parliamentary Liberal Party at the National Liberal Club on 18 December that 'If a Labour Government is ever to be tried in this country, as it will be sooner or later, it could hardly be tried under safer conditions'.¹³⁷

A joint meeting of the Labour national executive and the General Council of the TUC on 13 December had decided that Labour would form a government if they were 'called upon'.¹³⁸ While some on the left wanted a Labour government to present a radical programme and then fight an immediate election on its defeat. Clifford Allen said Labour should 'appeal to the country and fight on the issue of Labour versus the rest'.¹³⁹ Had Labour decided to take this course, the king would have been acting constitutionally if he had called on either the Conservative or Liberal leaders to form a government. The King had certainly received advice from Asquith to this

132 Quoted by Thomas, HC Debates, 5:169, 414, 18 Jan 1924.

133 Saturday Review, vol. 136, 15 Dec 1923, p.648.

134 Lyman, First Labour Government, p.81.

135 See Middlemas and Barnes, Baldwin, p.253, and Ramsden, Age of Balfour and Baldwin, p.182.

136 Cook, Short History of the Liberal Party, pp.95, 97.

137 Miliband, Parliamentary Socialism, p.100.

138 Miliband, Parliamentary Socialism, p.100.

139 New Leader, 14 Dec 1923 in Cook, Age of Alignment, p.209.

effect.¹⁴⁰ This would have meant Labour either had to accept this decision, or rebel against the constitution. The Labour leadership, however, meeting at the Webbs' house in Grosvenor Road, decided on a moderate line. As Snowden recalled, 'I urged very strongly to this meeting that we should not adopt an extreme policy ... We must show the country that we were not under the domination of wild men.'¹⁴¹ MacDonald, Henderson, Clynes, Sidney Webb and Thomas, all present at the meeting, were unlikely to need any convincing of this; since 1917 (and before) they had pursued the aim of creating Labour as a moderate and national party. It was decided that MacDonald would, following constitutional practice, pick his own government. Even New Leader accepted this decision: 'With our leader's discretion in forming his Cabinet a wise party will not interfere,' it explained. Webb noted that 'The responsibility of so sudden and unexpected an assumption of office gave the Party a shock which sobered even the wildest shouters.'¹⁴²

Having decided that they were ready to form a government, Labour leaders appealed for the chance to do so. They sought a reciprocal arrangement. Labour offered moderation; in return they asked for fair play. This was the crucial phrase in the period from 6 December 1923 to 21 January 1924. 'Fair play' had a long history as a political phrase, and it was inextricably linked to notions of Englishness.¹⁴³ MacDonald, having returned to Lossiemouth to choose his Cabinet, made a speech at Elgin, in which he made clear Labour's right to political justice:

He would appeal to the nation very solemnly and seriously, not only for the forms of the Constitution, but for the spirit of the Constitution, for fair play and plain dealing. Had it not been for the constitutional action of the Labour Party again and again in the face of all sorts of demagogic and revolutionary temptations the nation would not have been able, perhaps, in tranquillity and joy, to enjoy Christmas and the New Year Recess. He told them plainly that the price of the continuation of that tranquillity was gentlemanly and honest politics.¹⁴⁴

In return for fair play, Labour offered moderation and an avoidance of class politics. Again and again they stressed that Labour in government would act in the national interest. At the Albert Hall victory demonstration on 8 January, both MacDonald and Clynes explained this. MacDonald said, 'I am not thinking of party. I am

140 See Harold Nicolson, King George the Fifth: His Life and Reign, Constable, 1952, p.400n.

141 Snowden, Autobiography Volume Two, pp.595-596.

142 Sidney Webb, 'The First Labour Government,' Political Quarterly, vol. 32, no. 1, Jan-March 1961, p.9.

143 See for example, Rohan McWilliam, 'Radicalism and Popular Culture: The Tichborne Case and the Politics of "Fair Play", 1867-1886,' in Eugenio F. Biagini and Alistair J. Reid (eds.), Currents of Radicalism: Popular Radicalism, Organised Labour and Party Politics in Britain, 1850-1914, Cambridge UP, Cambridge, 1991.

144 The Times, 24 Dec 1924.

thinking of national well-being.... I want a Labour Government so that the life of the nation can be carried on.' Clynes also made the same point, but he remembered that Labour was the party of the working class. He argued, therefore, that any government should act as Labour would do:

Labour, if entrusted with the power of government, would not be influenced by any consideration other than that of national well-being. No class or sect or party could govern the British nation on narrow class lines, but any party having the responsibility of government would fail in its first duty if it did not give ready aid to the class numbering millions of the poorest in the country.¹⁴⁵

Asquith's National Liberal Club speech as well as Labour's promises had a calming effect. The Spectator, noting also that 'the profound knowledge and devastating logic of the permanent Official' would prove 'a terrible and salutary experience for any visionary,' decided that 'When ... the Labour Party demand fair play, we can say with our hand on our heart that they must certainly receive it.'¹⁴⁶ The Saturday Review was converted, though with some qualification. After MacDonald's Albert Hall speech, it said, 'We also desire to see fair play; but we do not regard the conflict of our own ideas and those of the Socialist Party as a cricket match.'¹⁴⁷

It was in a much calmed situation, therefore, that Labour moved an amendment to the royal address of the Baldwin government. Labour MPs assured the House of their good intentions towards the nation. Thomas reasserted Labour's role in the war and said that 'In spite of differences, we shall work with a single minded desire to make this country worthy of the citizens who showed their patriotism during its most troubled time.'¹⁴⁸ Labour had at least convinced Oswald Mosley, an Independent. 'It is about time,' he said, 'that hon. Gentlemen realised that any Government formed in this country will be composed of British men and women.'¹⁴⁹ On 21 January, Labour won its amendment by 328 to 256 votes. Shortly after midday, MacDonald was sworn into the Privy Council, and at 4.30 he met the King and constitutionally accepted the Prime Ministership of Great Britain.

The first Labour government saw its task as providing the climax to six years of Labour showing that it could be trusted with the government of the British

145 The Times, 9 Jan 1924. MacDonald also gave private assurances that a Labour government would act sensibly. In a letter to Thomas, 24 Dec 1924, referring to panic in the City, he asked Thomas 'to see one of your financial advisers and ask him if anything can be done to stop this sort of thing,' and he added a postscript: 'Could you possibly get conveyed to the King a statement that I am very much concerned about his peace of mind in the present crisis.' Blaxland, J.H. Thomas, pp.166-167.

146 The Spectator, vol. 132, 5 Jan 1924, p.7.

147 Saturday Review, vol. 137, 12 Jan 1924, p.29.

148 HC Debates, 5:169, 424, 18 Jan 1924.

149 Robert Skidelsky, Oswald Mosley, Papermac, London and Basingstoke, 1975, p.126.

Empire.¹⁵⁰ Even in its first days it began this process. The Labour ministers displayed all the constitutional niceties. Returning from Windsor where they had received the seals of office, the moderates laughed 'over Wheatley - the revolutionary - going down on both knees and actually kissing the King's hand'.¹⁵¹ MacDonald's choice of Cabinet and junior ministers had been made with an eye on the approval of all political parties. Only Wheatley and Jowett were on the left. Lansbury was excluded. As Sidney Webb later recorded, 'No one could pretend that a cabinet containing Haldane, Parmoor and Chelmsford was either contemptible, or likely to ruin the Empire.'¹⁵² MacDonald had relied more on Lord Haldane, Liberal Imperialist and framer of the pre-war army reforms, in forming his Cabinet than on any Labour figure. Baldwin had also urged Haldane to offer his services to MacDonald.¹⁵³ MacDonald also did his best to reassure the King of Labour's intentions. According to Lord Stamfordham, MacDonald 'assured the King that, though he and his friends were inexperienced in governing and fully realized the great responsibilities which they would now assume, nevertheless they were honest and sincere and his earnest desire was to serve his King and Country.'¹⁵⁴ Part of this reassurance came in the Labour's attitude to court dress. George V saw such details as part of the fabric of the monarchy and was concerned about Labour's attitude.¹⁵⁵ 'Fortunately Mr MacDonald proved to be a reasonable man,' the King's son later recorded; 'the new Prime Minister and his Cabinet in due course made their debut at Court colourfully clad in the uniform of Ministers of the Crown - a blue, gold-braided tailcoat and white knee-breeches with sword - a courtesy that went far to reassure my father.'¹⁵⁶

The Labour leaders, and indeed the majority of their supporters, came to share a view of a single nation to which they owed loyalty. Labour's advance to power meant that their patriotism was not in opposition to the governance of Britain, even when they became again His Majesty's Opposition. Both publicly and privately Labour ministers expressed their admiration for a country where 'the strange turn of Fortune's wheel ... had brought MacDonald the starveling clerk, Thomas the engine-driver, Henderson the foundry labourer, and Clynes the mill hand, to this pinnacle

150 See Lyman, First Labour Government, particularly chapter 12 for the conflict between this and socialism.

151 Norman and Jeanne MacKenzie (eds.), The Diary of Beatrice Webb Volume Four 1924-1943 'The Wheel of Life', Virago/London School of Economics and Political Science, 1985, p.10, [28?] Jan 1924.

152 Webb, 'The First Labour Government,' p.13.

153 Lyman, First Labour Government, pp.100-101.

154 Nicolson, King George the Fifth, p.384.

155 Kenneth Rose, King George V, Papermac, 1983, p.331.

156 Quoted in Dalton, Call Back Yesterday, p.146n.

beside the man whose forbears had been Kings for so many splendid generations.'¹⁵⁷ Thomas said, 'A Constitution which enables an engine cleaner of yesterday to be a Secretary of State today is a great Constitution.'¹⁵⁸ MacDonald recorded the events of 23 January in his diary: 'At noon there was a Privy Council at Buck. Pal; the seals were handed to us - and there we were Ministers of State. At 4 we held our first Cabinet. A wonderful country.'¹⁵⁹

Labour's social patriotism would henceforth be state-sponsored. Labour accepted a consensual view of Britain, and its political behaviour. Hence they used a language of Englishness to appeal for fair play. Labour accepted that English politics were like a game, and they were prepared to play by the rules. They simply asked that their political opponents did the same. A week before Labour took office in 1924, MacDonald expressed this sentiment perfectly:

The nation's Government - the King's Government [This was due to an interruption] - must be carried on and whoever carries it on, under these circumstances, is entitled to appeal for fair play, is entitled to appeal to the sportsmanlike instincts of Englishmen and Englishwomen so long as they are doing their duty.¹⁶⁰

157 Clynes, Memoirs 1869-1924, Hutchinson, 1937, p.343.

158 The Times, 8 March 1924, in Miliband, Parliamentary Socialism, p.93.

159 Marquand, Ramsay MacDonald, p.305.

160 HC Debates, 5:169, 99, 15 Jan 1924.

Epilogue and Conclusion

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were turbulent decades for Britain. International and imperial rivalries broke in upon its mid-century confidence. The same period saw the growth of an urban and industrial working class, and from it the modern British labour movement. To meet these developments patriotism and its necessary partner, the making of a national identity, became increasingly important to Britain's ruling elites. As Hugh Cunningham has explained:

The ruling class sought in patriotism a means of defusing the consciousness of the working class. The call for loyalty to the state rather than to any section of it was seen as a way both of reducing conflict and of facilitating the imposition of greater demands on the citizen by the state. Patriotism, that is, became a key component in the ideological apparatus of the imperial state.¹

The British left in its formative years, with the rest of the population, was faced with a bombardment of images of patriotism and Englishness/Britishness. But it would be simplistic to say that left-wing expressions of patriotism were only formed in response to this bombardment. The incidence of left patriotism is too widespread and recurs too often over a long period of time for this to be the case. Naturally there are some responses to accusations by the right of being unpatriotic, particularly in the House of Commons, where the right knew some Labour leaders could be embarrassed. But the fact that much of the left voluntarily chose patriotism as a theme of propaganda and as a tool in internal strategic debates stands in the way of calling the British left reluctant patriots. Until 1914 at least there is a vitality in left-wing manifestations of patriotism and Englishness that provide evidence of its sincerity, evidence which becomes greater when private expressions of patriotism are also considered.

But at no time during this period were the conditions right for the left to dominate the language of patriotism. Perhaps the moment the left came closest was in its opposition to the 'foreign yoke' of conscription, where the language meshed with a traditional dislike of compulsion and militarism. Significantly, opposition to conscription widened the constituency of the left. Many middle-class Liberals went over to Labour when their party acquiesced in demands for compulsory military service. But with the nation at war against another major industrial power, the

1 Cunningham, 'The Language of Patriotism,' in Raphael Samuel (ed.), Patriotism Volume I History and Politics, Routledge, 1989, p.77.

majority of the labour movement's representatives chose not to turn their opposition to conscription into action against it. A compromise between radical and traditional patriotism had anyway already been reached. The belief that the First World War was being fought against Prussianism, the antithesis of Englishness, brought about this merger. Some on the left, such as Hyndman and Blatchford, had made the connection a decade earlier. In 1914 the majority of the British left accepted the shared sources of their patriotism and ideas of Englishness with those of their political opponents. The anti-war left's reliance on the War Emergency Workers' National Committee for the defence of workers' interests, and their national defencism meant that the compact between the state and labour would not be seriously challenged. The majority of the British left had subordinated itself to the state as the representative of the nation. But it was also expected that in return for offering their services to the state/nation, advances in the position of the working class would be gained. Radical, oppositional patriotism gave way to social patriotism, reform would come through the state, not in opposition to it.

Events outside Britain also made a big impact upon patriotism. The Russian Revolution, whatever its shortcomings, presented to many labour activists an object of devotion outside their own country, a focal point for their internationalism. In the wake of the First World War when Labour leaders realised that government was within its sights, they were determined to prove they accepted the rules of British politics, indeed that they were fit to preside over those rules in government. Therefore to them, the Russian Revolution presented not a model to be emulated, but an embarrassment from which they wanted to distance themselves. They drew again upon the vocabulary of Englishness that had been used to brand anarchism, Marxism and syndicalism, as foreign. At the core of the British socialism they argued for was parliament, which they claimed was the acceptance of English history and traditions. It involved a further compromise with traditional views of Englishness which were given renewed vigour by Stanley Baldwin in the inter-war years. Hence as Tom Nairn has pointed out, 'Westminster's courtly institutions furnished both the spine for an entirely Parliament-oriented opposition, and an encompassing culture within which all essential questions of democratic and national identity had been forever resolved.'²

The inter-war years presented no major challenge to this dominant view of Englishness framed in radical patriotic vocabulary. Indeed such language became less attractive for the left of the labour movement. Radical patriotic language found

2 Tom Nairn, The Enchanted Glass: Britain and its Monarchy, Hutchinson Radius, 1988, p.289.

a home not in Englishness, but in Scottish and Welsh nationalisms. Plaid Cymru was formed in 1925. Socialists gave support to Scottish nationalist groups, until the Scottish National Party was formed in a merger with the conservative Scottish Party in 1934.³ Wales and Scotland contained local strongholds of the left of the labour movement. There was a belief that the English working class was more conservative than those of Scotland and Wales. The Clydeside Labour MPs were seen as being moulded by their Scottishness. James Leatham wrote in 1923 that

Scotland is nowhere more Scots, in the sense of being turbulent, than in the Second City: 'Scenes' at Westminster are the natural, spontaneous expression of the national character, and never had more legitimate reason for flaring up than it has in these days of governmental ineptitude and frank reaction, with, oddly enough, a Glasgow representative at the head of it [Bonar Law].⁴

The impact of mass unemployment in traditional heavy industries hit Scotland and Wales with greater severity than England as a whole, and this encouraged national feeling. The Scottish Labour Party maintained a strong commitment to Home Rule in the 1920s. The Communist Party was deeply embedded in the 'Little Moscows' of Wales and Scotland. It lent support to expressions of Celtic nationalism, particularly in the Popular Front period. In 1938 the Central Committee of the Communist Party declared its support for Welsh self-determination and the Welsh language.⁵

Events within the Labour movement also discouraged reference to ideas of the unity of the nation. MacDonald's betrayal in 1931 seemed to show what an over-concern for the national interest led to. The minute of the penultimate Cabinet meeting of crisis records that

In conclusion, the Prime Minister said that it must be admitted that the proposals as a whole represented the negation of everything that the Labour Party stood for, and yet he was absolutely satisfied that it was necessary in the national interest to implement them if the country was to be secured.⁶

When a large minority of the Cabinet led by Henderson realised that the dominant idea of the national interest conflicted to such an extent with their role as the

3 Kenneth O. Morgan, Rebirth of a Nation: Wales 1880-1980, Oxford UP/University of Wales Press, New York, 1981, pp.206-208; Keith Webb, The Growth of Nationalism in Scotland, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1978, p.74.

4 Quoted in James D. Young, The Rousing of the Scottish Working Class, Croom Helm, 1979, p.189.

5 Ian S. Wood, 'Hope Deferred: Labour in Scotland in the 1920s,' in Ian Donnachie, Christopher Harvie and Ian S. Wood (eds.), Forward! Labour Politics in Scotland 1888-1988, Polygon, Edinburgh, 1989, pp.35-36; Stuart Macintyre, Little Moscows: Communism and Working-class Militancy in Inter-war Britain, Croom Helm, 1980; Angus Calder, The Myth of the Blitz, Pimlico, 1992, pp.68-69.

6 David Marquand, Ramsay MacDonald, Jonathan Cape, 1977, p.634.

political representatives of the trade union movement, MacDonald left them behind to form a 'National' government.⁷

Labour's post-1931 leadership did not believe that a major rethink on strategy was necessary. Indeed it has been argued quite convincingly that MacDonald thought also of the Labour Party in 1931; he wanted to leave it as the party he had done so much to make. He did not want to denude it of its moderates, open to left-wing influence and less inclined to play the parliamentary game.⁸ But there were those in the party that questioned its direction. Some in the party asked the same question as Stafford Cripps: 'Can Socialism come by Constitutional Methods?' This took the left of the labour movement further away from the traditional Labour view of Englishness. But it was not Labour's constitutionalism that was threatened, but rather its gradualism. Cripps wrote that "revolutionary" action such as we have in mind can be taken within the walls of the Constitution.⁹ As the thirties progressed unemployment in Britain was contrasted with the planned economy of Soviet Russia, and the fight against fascism found its symbol in the Spanish Civil War. Grainger has commented that the left of the British labour movement could raise a glow only for foreign *patriae*.¹⁰ Left-wing young men went off to fight in Spain, and the Webbs, who had done so much to build a British socialism, visited Russia and declared it 'a new civilisation'.¹¹

The Labour leadership, often with the support of the majority of the party, continued to see politics as confined to parliament. Ellen Wilkinson, a newly-elected Labour MP, was rebuked by the 1936 Labour conference for organising the 'Jarrow Crusade'. Arthur Pugh decried calls for extra-parliamentary activity against the unemployment benefit cuts in 1931; 'that has not been the method of the British Trades Union Movement,' he declared. 'Whether it is on the political side or on the industrial side,' he continued, 'the British Trades Union Movement throughout the

7 For the crisis see R. Bassett, Nineteen Thirty-One: Political Crisis, Gower edition, 1986; Robert Skidelsky, Politicians and the Slump: The Labour Government of 1929-1931, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1970; and especially, Philip Williamson, National Crisis and National Government: British Politics, the Economy and Empire, 1926-1932, Cambridge UP, Cambridge, 1992. Williamson rejects the notions of 'national interest' or 'patriotism' as leading explanations for responses to the 'national crisis', since what constituted the 'national interest' was the subject of controversy (p.17).

8 Bassett, Nineteen Thirty-One, p.180.

9 See Ralph Miliband, Parliamentary Socialism, second edition, Merlin, 1972, chapter 7.

10 J.H. Grainger, Patriotisms: Britain 1900-1939, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986, p.329.

11 See Royden Harrison, 'Sidney and Beatrice Webb,' in Carl Levy (ed.), Socialism and the Intelligentsia 1880-1914, Routledge and Kegan Paul/History Workshop, London and New York, 1987, pp.35-89. For British socialists 'grand illusions' in Stalin see A.J. Davies, To Build a New Jerusalem: The British Labour Movement from the 1880s to the 1990s, Michael Joseph, 1992, chapter 7.

struggles of the past century has been gradually building, building and building.¹² Clement Attlee, elected leader in 1935, could still write that the Labour Party was 'an expression of the Socialist movement adapted to British conditions,' and that British socialism was not influenced by Marx since it 'is not the creation of a theorist. It does not propagate some theory in another country. It is seeking to show the people of Britain that the Socialism which it preaches is what the country requires in order in modern conditions to realise the full genius of this nation.'¹³

The expulsion from the Labour Party in 1939 of Stafford Cripps, leading Labour rebel, shows that the politics he represented, questioning the political strategy of gradualism and arguing for a Popular Front, were never official Labour policies.¹⁴ Nevertheless the dominant popular mythology of the thirties is of a left, flirting with Communism through such groups as the Left Book Club, in opposition to the National government, and concerning itself with fighting fascism and unemployment. Labour left and Communist politics did not lend themselves easily to an oppositional Englishness,¹⁵ and it is only the popular survival of the myth of the 'Red Decade' that makes the dominance of patriotism by the left in the Second World War appear surprising. The apparent failure of appeasement and the inadequacies of the appeasers once war was declared led to the entry of the Labour Party into the coalition government in May 1940. This combined with a popular radicalism to enable the left to appropriate patriotism.¹⁶ But it is important to understand that the left had in fact found its way back into a long tradition of oppositional Englishness and social patriotism, which provided a vocabulary ideally suited to fighting a 'people's war'. The combination of British socialism and patriotism in evidence after 1939 did not spring from nowhere, but from a version of patriotism that the left in Britain had long held.

The transition back to the language of patriotism had also been eased by one outcome of the thirties. This was the leftward shift of middle-class intellectuals (for

12 John Stevenson and Chris Cook, The Slump: Society and Politics during the Depression, Jonathan Cape, 1977, p.185; Miliband, Parliamentary Socialism, p.187.

13 Quoted in Kenneth Harris, Attlee, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1982, p.130.

14 See Ben Pimlott, Labour and the Left in the 1930s, Allen and Unwin, 1986 for relations between leaders and rebels, particularly over the Popular Front.

15 Popular Frontism did however find the CPGB trying to claim oppositional Englishness for their own. In 1936 it organised a 'March of English History' in Hyde Park. The programme described the English as 'a people proud of their instinct for fair play, for the rule of law and justice ...' See Kevin Morgan, Against Fascism and War: Ruptures and Continuities in British Communist Politics, 1935-41, Manchester UP, Manchester and New York, 1989, pp.41-42.

16 Paul Addison, The Road to 1945: British Politics and the Second World War, Jonathan Cape, 1975; Geoffrey Field, 'Social Patriotism and the British Working Class: Appearance and Disappearance of a Tradition,' International Labor and Working Class History, no. 42, 1992, pp.20-39.

want of a better description), those very people George Orwell had described as 'boiled rabbits of the Left' who failed to appreciate the meaning of patriotism.¹⁷ Interest in left-wing causes led these middle-class radicals to investigate the common people, from which they were in wartime to draw the materials for a democratic view of Englishness. J.B. Priestley, whose radio broadcasts in 1940 were second only in popularity to those of Churchill, had in 1933 made his 'English Journey'. Orwell in 1936 embarked upon 'the road to Wigan Pier.' The documentary film movement, though restricted in its radicalism by government and commercial sponsorship, went in search of the working class in thirties Britain, producing such films as Night Mail (1936) and Spare Time (1939).¹⁸ Humphrey Jennings, the maker of the latter film, was also a co-founder of a related movement, Mass Observation. As Raphael Samuel has commented 'Cultural nationalism is an inescapable sub-text in 1930s literature and *leitmotif* of the documentary in writing and film.'¹⁹

Towards the end of the thirties, Labour had found its way to supporting the National government's rearmament programme. In 1937 the Parliamentary Labour Party did not vote against the military estimates, though the decision not to do so had been opposed by Attlee, Morrison and Greenwood. Bevin and Dalton were vocal advocates of rearmament, and by the time of the Czechoslovakian crisis, Labour was demanding that the government change policy. There were various motives on the left behind the desire to resist Hitler, but through the failure of the government Labour gained the approbation of Tory rebels. Hence on 2 September 1939 after a confused speech by Chamberlain, Leo Amery called on Greenwood, acting as Labour leader, to 'Speak for England!'²⁰ The turning-point came, however, in 1940 rather than in 1939. Patriotism was not without its problems for Labour. In April 1939 Chamberlain had announced the government's intention to re-introduce conscription, to which the Labour Party remained vigorously opposed. The arguments of 1915 and 1916 were renewed. Attlee, also foreshadowing one aspect of wartime propaganda, declared that, 'The voluntary efforts of a free people are more effective than any regimentation by dictatorships.' Another Labour MP, E.G. Hicks, asked, 'Is the spirit of the volunteer now beneath the military jack-boot? ...

17 Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (eds.), The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell Volume 1 An Age Like This 1920-1940, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1970, p.592.

18 Paul Swann, The British Documentary Film Movement, 1926-1946, Cambridge UP, Cambridge, 1989.

19 Samuel, 'Introduction: Exciting to be English,' in Samuel (ed.), Patriotism I, p.xxiii. See also Addison, The Road to 1945, chapter 5.

20 A.J.P. Taylor, English History 1914-1945, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1975, p.552. For a critical account of Labour and 'the challenge of appeasement' see Miliband, Parliamentary Socialism, chapter 8.

The old British tradition of freedom has been dealt a severe blow by this proposal for conscription.²¹ The left did not trust Chamberlain's government, hence while it remained in office, the left would remain wary. Blitzkrieg and Dunkirk, however, made 'guilty men' of Chamberlain and his accomplices.²² In 1940, the 'People's War' began. The moderate Socialist Clarity Group expressed this perception of change: 'This war,' it argued in June 1940, 'which originated in capitalist and imperialist conflicts and began under capitalist leadership, is now assuming the character which was implicit in it from the outset - that of a people's war for liberty and social progress against the forces of reaction and monopoly power.'²³ It was a combination of the left's national defencism, the cultural nationalism of the 1930s, the inadequacies of the appeasers, and a tradition of radical patriotism from the 1880s, that allowed the left to take patriotism for itself in 1940. As Addison says of Labour's entry into government in 1940, so of patriotism: 'Labour were not in reality *given* office: they broke in and took it'.²⁴

There were, however, limits. Churchill was Prime Minister. The Britain of the 'why we fight' mode, as Churchill liked to point out, had a long history. As Angus Calder has remarked, Dunkirk was about 'reiteration, retrenchment, history-as-made'.²⁵ It was a shared history, but in 1940 the left had a stronger claim to it.

The Second World War left-wing patriots rarely acknowledged that their oppositional patriotism had its origins inside the left. Orwell acknowledged that one source of his patriotism was his middle-class upbringing, mocking himself that 'a time comes when the sand of the desert is sodden red and what have I done for thee, England my England.'²⁶ But he was deeply critical of what he perceived as the lack of patriotism of British socialists. This failure to acknowledge a debt was based on a memory of the thirties when much of the left was seen as calling for 'Arms for Spain' but not for Britain. Longer term memories were of the 'betrayal' by the left in 1914, when it had supported a war that, in the popular view of the thirties, had been a massive waste of life, which resulted in the betrayal of the hopes to build a land fit for heroes.

In the general election of 1945 Labour won its first overall parliamentary majority. Its victory marked the victory of social patriotism, of improving the condition of the

21 House of Commons Parliamentary Debates, 5th Series, vol. 346, cols. 1361, 1397, 27 April 1939. See also Arthur Greenwood, col. 1440, and H.B. Lees-Smith, col. 2113, 4 May 1939.

22 See Addison, The Road to 1945, chapter 4.

23 Quoted in Calder, The Myth of the Blitz, p.80.

24 Addison, The Road to 1945, p.62.

25 Calder, The Myth of the Blitz, p.8.

26 Michael Sheldon, Orwell The Authorised Biography, Minerva, 1992, p.347; see also Orwell 'My Country Right or Left,' Orwell and Angus (eds), Collected Essays, pp.587-592.

people as a patriotic endeavour, over traditional patriotism. Churchill's allegations, that Labour's socialism would require some form of Gestapo, were swept aside. Attlee replied that the Prime Minister's memory was short, since he had 'forgotten that socialist theory was developed in Britain long before Karl Marx by Robert Owen.' He reiterated Labour's patriotism:

Our appeal to you ... is not narrow or sectional. We are proud of the fact that our country in the hours of its greatest danger stood firm and united, setting an example to the world of how a great democratic people rose to the height of the occasion and saved democracy and liberty.... We have to preserve and enhance the beauty of our country to make it a place where men and women may live finely and happily, free to worship God in their own way, free to speak their minds, free citizens of a great country.²⁷

Labour went to the polls with an alternative democratic interpretation of Englishness.²⁸ It shared many characteristics with more traditional views. Parliament was placed at the core of a Whiggish national history of the gradual advancement to political liberty. Socialisms that did not accept this view were branded as foreign. Despite the wartime alliance with Russia, the un-Englishness of Soviet Communism was to play a major role in the prevalence of support in the Labour Party for the anti-Russian slant of Bevin's foreign policy.²⁹ This shared view indeed formed an important part of the partnership between Labour and the nation. It made the nation's existence possible, if, to quote a French writer:

A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle. Two things, which in truth are but one, constitute this soul or spiritual principle. One lies in the past, one in the present. One is the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories; the other is present-day consent, the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one has received in an undivided form.³⁰

Most of the British left shared memories of British, mainly English, history with the wider nation, and gave its consent to perpetuate the value of this heritage. The left's consent is only understandable because of its development since the 1880s. It was a development deliberately shaped to make a British socialism, a process largely completed by 1924. British Socialism must take its place alongside other 'invented traditions'.

27 Harris, Attlee, pp.256-257.

28 Friendship with Soviet Russia was also important in 1945. Ernest Bevin had talked of 'left speaking to left in comradeship and confidence,' and the Labour Party conference that year had sung the 'Internationale' as well as 'The Red Flag' and 'Auld Lang Syne'. Kenneth O. Morgan, Labour in Power 1945-1951, Clarendon, Oxford, 1984, p.240; Labour Party, Conference Report, 1945, p.152.

29 See Morgan, Labour in Power, pp.239-261.

30 Ernest Renan, 'What is a Nation?' (1882) in Homi K. Bhabha (ed.), Nation and Narration, Routledge, 1990, p.19.

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